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Lovelace, Colin John

CONTROL AND CENSORSHIP OF THE PRESS DURING THE FIRST WORLD WAR

BY

Colin John Lovelace

Kings College London

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ABSTRACT

During the late nineteenth century and early part of the twentieth, the Service Departments (Admiralty and War Office) had wanted compulsory government control of the press in war-time; they discovered both before and during the war that a rigid system of control requiring the submission of press material before publication along Continental lines was unnecessary in view of the generally cooperative attitude of most newspapers towards the military and other authorities. There was no official government control of the press during the First World War in Britain as there was in France and Germany. But the press became subject, in August 1914, to a system of press censorship which was an uneasy compromise between compulsory government control and censorship of international cables and the censorship of voluntarily submitted press material. The thesis examines how such a system came into being, its objectives, its organization through the Press Bureau and its effectiveness, particularly through the operation of instructions and requests to the press known as D Notices. Most newspapers and journals cooperated with the censorship authorities; some did not and the thesis traces the Press Bureau's unsuccessful attempts to achieve departmental status with a view to imposing a more rigid control over a newspaper press which for the most part, remained free to publish its news, opinions and criticisms throughout the war. Despite this relative freedom, newspapers remained highly critical of 'the censorship', regarding it as unfair, inefficient and in the light of their own self-censorship, an unnecessary impediment to the successful prosecution of the war.

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PREFACE

'... censorship is no fourth grade subject'. Robert E. Summers, Wartime Censorship of Press and Radio (New York, H.W. Wilson Co., 1942) p.23.

Studies about the press and related subjects in this country have until recently been left almost entirely to journalists. Many of these accounts, like those of A.G. Gardiner, Tom Clarke or Kennedy Jones have recalled their editorial days in Fleet Street in terms of great personalities and racy anecdotes. A few journalists, notably Norman Angell, Francis Williams and more latterly John Whale have sought to redress the balance with more scholarly accounts of press behaviour and influence but it has only been in the last decade or so that academics in this country have been turning their attention to the press which as Colin Seymour-Ure has written in The Press, Politics and the Public is 'widely believed by those who care about politics to have an important political function'.[1]

Just how important that function is in the formation of public opinion and its effect on political decisions is the subject of endless debate among historians and sociologists but a principal component of that function as identified by Seymour-Ure is the way 'newspapers help choose the subjects we have views about',[2] a point made by H. Hamilton Fyfe, a former editor of the Daily Mail and one of the 'great personalities' school of journalistic writers in appropriately anecdotal form. In his book, Sixty Years of Fleet Street, Fyfe recalls how a northern editor, upon being asked by a visitor to his office if he was the man who put things in the paper,replied 'No madam, I'm the man who keeps things out'.[3] In other words,censorship is an integral part of any study of the press for in the words of Nicholas Garnham : 'All news is censorship. That is to say, it is the imposition of a structure of significance on inchoate reality'.[4]

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1. Colin Seymour-Ure, The Press, Politics and the Public, (London, Methuen & Co., 1968) p.14.
2. ibid, p, 27.
3. H.H. Fyfe, Sixty Years of Fleet Street (London, W.H.Allen,1949 p.96.
4. The Sunday Times 3rd September 1978.

We are all censors in the Freudian sense of excluding certain subjects or forms of thought from our minds. In most societies a cultural censorship exists which frowns upon or excludes some forms of behaviour or expressions. It is possible to belong to a group or organization in which particular subjects are not easily discussed - Christian ethics would not usually be discussed at branch meetings of the Communist Party but they would be freely discussed elsewhere. Climates of opinion can exist in a society in which pressure is brought to bear to avoid the mention of certain subjects - Lord Lansdowne's difficulties in finding a newspaper to publish his letter advocating peace negotiations in 1917 is an example as is George Orwell's problems in finding a publisher for Animal Farm in the pro-Soviet climate of 1944.[5]

While we must bear these categories in mind as ever present forces at work upon journalists, particularly during a period of heightened tension such as a war, there are two further categories of censorship which are of particular relevance to the present study of press censorship during the First World War. They are voluntary group censorship and legal censorship imposed by government authority. In 1912 newspaper organizations representing the national and provincial press agreed to participate in a voluntary censorship of Defence subjects operated by a committee of Press and Service representatives known as the Admiralty, War Office and Press Committee, (but known more generally as the Joint Committee, a title used throughout the present study). This was the beginning of a voluntary code of group censorship which continued to operate during the war and has existed in one form or another to the present day.

As for the legally imposed category, plans existed in the War Book quite apart from the operation of this voluntary system, for the official censorship of cables and wireless messages during a war which would inevitably affect international press cablegrams. The principal object of such a censorship was to prevent any information of possible value to an enemy from being published in the press. The Service Departments would have preferred to have had the power through a Parliamentary Bill

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5. These categories of censorship are largely taken from the work of the American sociologist, William Albig Modern Public Opinion, (New York, McGraw 1939), pp. 243-6

to take control of the press in the event of a war. The 1912 voluntary agreement was the closest they came to getting this in peacetime and after 1912 not much thought was given to what role the voluntary agreement and its committee would have in relationship to the legal machinery and organization set up to operate the cable censorship. A situation ripe for confusion and misunderstanding which duly materialized

When war broke out in August 1914, the War Book plans for the censorship by the War Office of cables and the censorship of wireless messages by the Admiralty went into immediate effect causing unexpected delays and a temporary shortage of hard news. Defence of the Realm Regulations (D.O.R.A.) were instantly passed by Parliament, several of which directly affected the press and which on paper looked extremely severe. The Joint Committee, without an executive staff and with its Service members heavily engaged in urgent war preparations, was besieged with enquiries from editors both for up-to-date information and for guidance over D.O.R.A. Regulations. Out of this chaotic situation emerged the official Press Bureau (a pre-war brainchild of Churchill, the First Lord of the Admiralty) whose primary task, although this was not made clear to the public, was to take over the supervision of the voluntary press censorship hitherto performed by the Joint Committee.[6] Parliament was told that the Bureau had been established to provide a better supply of reliable news to counteract the spread of false rumours and exaggerated headlines; it could hardly be told that its principal task would be to take over the work of a Committee whose existence had never been publicly acknowledged.

With the establishment of the Bureau, the Service Departments could feel well satisfied. They had direct control over press cablegrams, and through the D Notice system and the dependence of the Bureau upon their decisions, indirect control over the voluntarily submitted press copy without becoming too involved or publicly associated with censorship or publicity issues. The press were far less happy with the turn of events. They had been prevented from sending war correspondents to the front, they were at first uneasy both about the D.O.R.A. Regulations and

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6. To add to the confusion, the Joint Committee remained in being throughout the war without any clearly defined function or purpose.

of the varieties of authorities - Home Office, Service Departments and locally based Competent Military Authorities, all of them empowered under the Regulations to act against them. The newspapers were experiencing delays to the cablegrams and they were submitting copy for censorship which was not always fairly or efficiently dealt with - all factors which adversely affected their commercial competitiveness. Not surprisingly, but often quite unfairly, they vented their spleen upon the Press Bureau.

One of the most outstanding contributions to the academic study of the press and related subjects in this century has been made by the American historian, Lucy Maynard Salmon in two books both published in New York in 1923. In The Newspaper and the Historian, [7] Salmon has produced an invaluable guide for all academics seeking to use the press as a source material although it is the chapters on press censorship in The Newspaper and Authority, [8] which are clearly of most immediate relevance to the present study.

In a discussion on censorship, Salmon argues forcefully that military censorship is 'the most primitive form of censorship exercised by the State...' [9], the easiest to justify on the grounds that information should be kept from an enemy and the easiest to enforce. She is also quite adamant, citing mainly examples from the war-time German experiences of press censorship, that such a military censorship inevitably leads to other forms, in particular to political censorship of press material. We shall see in this study that this was certainly the British experience where by 1917/18, news from Bolshevik Russia was severely censored and where the publications of those minorities opposed to the war were the most affected by the censorship and other authorities.

Salmon distinguishes between what she describes as preventive and repressive systems of press censorship. 'A preventive censorship exercises a previous control' [10] over press material by supervising and possibly

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7. L.M. Salmon, The Newspaper and the Historian (New York, Oxford University Press, 1923).
8. L.M. Salmon, The Newspaper and Authority (New York, Oxford University Press, 1923), Chapter II-V and XII passim.
9. ibid., p.19.
10. ibid., pp.9-10

amending copy for publication whereas, Salmon suggests, a repressive system criticizes articles and punishes newspapers for publishing them after the offending items have appeared. British press censorship during the First World War was a mixture of both. Preventive censorship was attempted mainly through the operation of the D Notices system and repressive censorship featured, albeit haphazardly, directed principally against small and generally insignificant newspapers and journals rather than against the large circulation and influential newspapers like those of Lord Northcliffe or Edward Hulton.

Although there has been plenty of work done on war-time propaganda, there have been relatively few academic studies concerning the First World War press since 1923 and even fewer of press censorship during the period. Philip Towle, in an article in the War and Society[11] series has provided a useful introduction to the subject by examining pre-1914 Service distrust of the press which manifested itself in demands for control of the press in the event of war. The present study has built upon Towle's work by showing how far this Service view of the press as being unreliable over Defence topics was shared by certain journalists and editors whose influence was decisive in the emergence of a voluntary code of group censorship, so vital an ingredient in the war-time press censorship system.

Three books appeared immediately after the war concerned with the press and the Service Departments - Sir Edward Cook's The Press in War-Time,[12] Major General Sir Charles Callwell's Experiences of a Dug-Out,[13] and Sir Douglas Brownrigg's Indiscretions of the Naval Censor[14] - all written by officials directly involved with the press censorship, all containing valuable insights into how the system worked but all clearly composed under the shadow of the Official Secrets Act. As Brownrigg mused in the form of a postscript : ' (I wish I could have told the whole truth)'[15].

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11. Philip Towle, The Debate on Wartime Censorship in Britain, 1902-14 in Brian Bond and Ian Roy (eds.) War and Society (London, Croom Helm, 1975) pp.103-116.

12 Sir Edward Cook, The Press in War-Time (London, Macmillan and Co., 1920).

13. Major General Sir C.E. Callwell, Experiences of a Dug-Out (London, Constable and Co., 1920).

14. Sir Douglas Brownrigg, Indiscretions of the Naval Censor (London, Cassell and Co., 1920).

15. ibid., p269.

Cook's work is a neatly written monograph about his days as joint Director of the Press Bureau from May 1915 but it contains little detailed information about what was censored, by whom and to what effect. Cook says little about the uncertain constitutional and administrative relationship between the Press Bureau and the departments of state which caused many problems during the war and although he mentions that over seven hundred D Notices were issued, his book contains few examples of these or any evaluation of their effectiveness - all areas which the present study has sought to clarify.

It was not until 1970 that any academic study of the British war-time press censorship appeared with the publication of Deian Hopkin's article Domestic Censorship in the First World War,[16] a study which touches on such issues as press power and the anomalous constitutional position of the Bureau. Hopkin rightly points to the paradoxical situation which had been reached by 1918 when calls were being made in Parliament for restraints on press power and influence at a time when the press was subject to an allegedly strict censorship. Hopkin has looked mainly at Home Office files, H.O. 45 in particular, with its emphasis on administrative attempts (largely unsuccessful) to repress pacifist groups and their publications. By examining other Home Office papers, particularly H.O. 139 (fifty-six boxes of Press Bureau files), Admiralty and War Office papers, the private papers of editors and proprietors and a representative cross section of mainly metropolitan newspapers, the present thesis has sought to take a closer look at this intriguing phenomenon of a free yet censored press, a press which in the main, far from objecting in principle to the occasional repressive strikes against pacifist journals, actively encouraged and applauded their official prosecution.

By concentrating a good deal of his attention on Home Office influence over the press censorship, Hopkin does confirm the strongly political bias at work in its operation, a factor largely denied by Stephen Inwood in his impressive study of the political role of the press during the First World War.[17] Inwood follows the line adopted by spokesmen for the Bureau both during and after the war that the press censorship was lacking

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16. Journal of Contemp. History, 1970, Vol 4, pp. 151-169

17. Stephen Inwood, The Role of the Press in English Politics during the First World War (Unpublished Ph. D., thesis, University of Oxford, 1971)

any political inspiration or importance - a view certainly challenged in the present work. The suppression of The Globe and Forward albeit for very short periods, as well as the censorship of pacifist and minority publications were essentially politically motivated actions. The Press Bureau Directors are on record as being on the look out for any news which appeared in support of strikes or industrial unrest and the censorship of Bolshevik propaganda (on the direct orders of Lloyd George's War Cabinet) cannot be described as anything but political. Much of the press and Parliamentary abuse levelled against the Bureau was political in that it sought to use the inefficiencies and uncertainties of the press censorship as a weapon to undermine public confidence in both the Liberal administration of the war and Asquith's premiership. 'The censorship' was far less an issue in the press and in Parliament after Lloyd George became Prime Mininster in December 1916.

Finally to self-censorship, an aspect of the subject which few of the works mentioned above give more than a passing mention but which, in a largely voluntary scheme pervaded the whole manner in which the press reported the war. It is an area not easy to document or evaluate and like a detective, the historian must track down private references and relate them to public silences or distortions. All journalists censor as part of their job but in war-time the temptations to suppress or re-write 'in the national interest' are at their greatest. The Times openly confessed to doing so. Why have an official press censorship, ran their argument, when we can do the job much better ourselves? But the Service Departments were in no doubt as to the efficacy of an officially inspired but voluntary press censorship which they successfully insisted should be revived with much the same ambiguous powers and manipulative practices in 1939.

Who were 'the press' referred to throughout the thesis? The press censorship during the First World War was very much a metropolitan affair - the Press Bureau and the Service Departments were in Whitehall and there were no regional offices. It was principally the Fleet Street agencies, newspapers and journals who most frequently submitted copy for censoring and, perhaps not surprisingly, most often complained about

the censorship and who therefore have received most attention. Of these metropolitan newspapers and journals, those looked at in most detail have been those featured on E.R. Robbins's '40 List' (Robbins, General Manager of the Press Association, distributed the D Notices on behalf of the Bureau and the '40 List' consisted of those newspapers and journals considered by Robbins in consultation with Sir George Riddell of the Newspaper Proprietors Association to be the most influential and responsible to receive the most confidential Notices). Not that the provincial press has been ignored - a sample of the leading provincial journals has been looked at concerning all the major issues and events involving the censorship. A more detailed look at the pre-war structure, personalities and history of the press has been undertaken in Chapter 1 as a corollary to discussion on the pre-war attitudes of the Service Departments towards the press.

CHAPTER 1

Origins

'Censorship of the press as it is known today seems like Minerva to have sprung full armed from the head of Jove.' Lucy M. Salmon, The Newspaper and Authority op. cit.,(1923) p. 14.

Distrust and dislike of the press were endemic in the Service departments. Wellington had detested the press and war correspondents. 'What can be done with such people', he wrote to his brother, Sir Henry Wellesley, from the Peninsula about the activities of The Times foreign correspondent Henry Crabb Robinson '...excepting to despise them'.[1] Wolseley, Commander-in-Chief of the British army at the turn of the century described war correspondents as '...a race of drones...a newly invented curse'.[2]

Experience in the Crimea where Sir William Russell's revelations in The Times had led to the replacement of the Commander-in-Chief and the fall of the government at home, and persistent 'indiscretions'[3] in the press about the Fashoda crisis and defence subjects in general had convinced the War Office by the late nineteenth century of the need to have ready a Parliamentary Bill providing for some form of control of the press in time of war or national emergency. The aim of such a Bill being to prevent any information reaching an enemy through press disclosures particularly in a period immediately prior to an outbreak of hostilities.

In March 1899 Sir Evelyn Wood, Adjutant General at the War Office, concerned as he put it at 'the possibility of (an enemy)...reaping advantage...by the multiplication and acceleration of the means of communication and the feverish competition of modern journalists to obtain news which will interest the enormous reading public they cater for'[4] had first suggested a scheme of press censorship. This would have

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1. J.H. Stocqueler, The Duke of Wellington p. 152, cited by Salmon The Newspaper and the Historian op.cit.,(1923) p.198.
2. Cited by Michael MacDonough, 'Can We Rely on War News?' in the Fortnightly Review (April 1898).
3. Memorandum by Sir Evelyn Wood, Adjutant General, War Office, 1st March 1899, P.R.O. WO 32/6/381.
4. ibid.

involved military censors working in newspaper offices but 'after consultation with the D.M.I. (Director of Military Intelligence) and amongst owners and managers of papers', Wood came to the conclusion that 'the difficulties of carrying out a press censorship in a country such as England are insuperable ...no working machinery for the purpose could be devised'.[5] Writing in the Fortnightly Review in March 1906 under the pseudonym 'A Journalist', Sidney Brooks, who was to play an important role as a go-between in pre-war press/Service Department negotiations, elaborated on press objections to such a scheme : 'a censorship is theoretically conceivable but ...unworkable in practice ...one censor (in each newspaper office) would pass what another would delete ...moreover in a real national emergency the capacity and intelligence that go to make a good censor could be employed far more effectively elsewhere and a poor censor is worse than none at all'.

Undeterred, Wood went on to suggest, and believed the press would prefer, 'to accept the simple and effective remedy of prohibiting the publication altogether of any military or naval news, except what could be supplied to them daily by the War Office and Admiralty'[6] by means of a Parliamentary Bill. While not rejecting this idea in principle, Wood's political master, Lord Lansdowne, Secretary of War, believed that such a contentious piece of legislation would be difficult if not impossible to get through the House of Commons. Instead Lansdowne argued that the War Office should talk to 'the leading newspapers ...(who) I believe will do their best to help us'[7]- the indirect method of press control which got nowhere in 1899 but which was eventually to be successfully adopted.

But the far reaching changes in British military strategy, by which Germany rather than Russia became regarded as the most likely enemy in a future conflict involving Britain, was the single most driving force behind the renewed calls for war-time press control.[8] An Imperial Law

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5. Wood, War Office Memorandum , P.R.O. WO 32/6/381.
6. ibid.
7. Lord Lansdowne, War Office Memorandum, 30th September 1899, ibid.
8. N.W. Summerton, The Development of British Military Planning for a War Against Germany, 1904-14 (Unpublished Ph.D. thesis University of London, 1970). Chapter 1, passim.

of 1874 gave the German army total control over the press during war-time, a fact not overlooked by either Lord Esher or Sir George Clarke, secretary of the Committee of Imperial Defence (C.I.D.), principal architects of this new anti-German policy which they successfully pursued through the C.I.D.[9]

Two wars, the South African War of 1899-1902 and the Russo/Japanese War of 1904-05 added impetus in 1905, to an attempt by the C.I.D. to proceed with a draft 'Publication of Naval and Military Information Bill' along the lines pursued by Wood in 1899. In South Africa, war correspondents like Edgar Wallace and G.W. Steevens clashed regularly with the field censorship authorities who operated the regulations, according to Sidney Brooks with 'irritating and unpredictable exhibitions of caprice and favouritism'.[10]

In the Russo/Japanese conflict the Japanese authorities closely supervised the copy of all war correspondents accompanying their forces and nothing appeared in the Japanese press without official approval. The Russians, more casual in their approach, allowed war correspondents complete freedom. News of the departure of the Russian fleet from Vladivostock in August 1904 was telegraphed by correspondents to London papers. The Japanese embassy in London relayed the news to Japan thus enabling Admiral Kaminura to intercept and defeat the Russian fleet. On land, information from journalists with the Russian Commander-in-Chief assisted the Japanese to overcome the Russians at the battle of Sha-ho in October 1904.[11] With military attachés observing on both sides, the lessons were not lost upon the War Office or the Service press which began to call for the control of the war correspondent and a policy towards the press in general in the event of a future conflict.[12]

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9. J. McDermott, The Revolution in British Military Thinking from the Boer War to the Moroccan Crisis in Paul M.Kennedy (ed.) The War Plans of the Great Powers, 1880-1914 (London, George Allen & Unwin 1979) pp. 108-112.

10. 'The Press in War-Time', Fortnightly Review, March 1906. The identical description is used in an article in the Fortnightly Review for April 1913 again signed 'A Journalist'which along with other phrases in Brooks correspondence help to establish his authorship of the articles.

11. F.McCullogh, With the Cossacks (London, Eveleigh Nash & Co.Ltd,1906) p.181, cited by Philip Towle, op.cit. (1975) p.106.

12. Asked what the army had learnt from the Russo-Japanese War, one forthright British army officer stated : 'how to muzzle the press', Towle, ibid., p11

The proposed C.I.D. Bill would have forbidden the publication of all naval or military information at a time of national emergency unless authorised by the Service authorities. Owners, publishers and editors of newspapers and journals who 'knowingly published any information... in contravention of this Act'[13] faced a fine of one thousand pounds and/or twelve month prison sentence. Active support for the measure by the press was seen by Sir George Clarke (later Lord Sydenham), Secretary of the C.I.D., as of paramount importance. Sidney Brooks, the free-lance journalist already cited above was recruited by Clarke as an informal negotiator to 'convert press opinion' to the C.I.D. view.[14]

In a letter to editors in October 1905, Brooks pointed out that press disclosures during the Fashoda crisis and during the Dogger Bank incident 'when every movement of our Fleet was chronicled'[15] had shown that without realising it journalists could place the country in great jeopardy. Brooks argued as a journalist that'...it is a question which involves the credit and utility of our profession...there is a grave risk of the Press becoming a public danger and unwittingly jeopardising the success of our naval and military operations'.[16]

Brooks gained a wide degree of support from proprietors and editors, both privately and in public for the general principle of some form of control of news in war-time. Bell, Manager of The Times, replied that he 'approved generally'; A.G. Gardiner, editor of the Daily News, had no objection 'to any well considered scheme' and Robert Donald,editor of the Daily Chronicle, informed Brooks that he was 'prepared to support a Bill'.[17]

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13. P.R.O. Cab 17/19.

14. In a letter to Clarke on 23rd October 1905 Brooks stated that 'I do not think they need any conversion-the leading London editors- to the official view', ibid.

15. Circular letter, Brooks to proprietors and editors, October 1905, P.R.O. Cab 17/91/B23(b).

16. ibid.

17. 7th November 1905, 2nd November 1905, 31st October 1905, P.R.O. Cab 12/91/B23(b).Surprisingly, in view of his later attacks upon all forms of official interference with the press, Alfred Harmsworth, later Lord Northcliffe, replied : 'I am entirely in favour of making penal the publication of news detrimental to national safety in time of war or before the outbreak of war...one would have thought the Government would have tackled this vital question years ago'. Harmwsorth to Brooks, 1st November 1905, ibid.

The Times under a leader headed: 'The Press as an Intelligence Agent in Time of War' agreed that 'we are bound to consider without prejudice whether a judicial measure for controlling the publication of war intelligence ought not to be tolerated for the common good of all' (21st May 1906). The Morning Post on the 23rd of July 1906 stated that 'we should be perfectly willing to advocate the passing of an Act that would make the unauthorised publication of all naval and military movements a penal offence'.

But this support was forthcoming principally because as Brooks pointed out in his circular : 'if carried, the Bill would leave the Press entirely free, as now, to criticise, comment upon and if necessary, expose the conduct of any campaign...and it would involve a fuller and more adequate supply of information'.[18] And as Northcliffe's Daily Mail observed on the 18th of November 1906, 'It would be difficult to oppose a Bill making it a penal offence to record naval or military movements as ...it would in no way interfere with the war correspondents, whose despatches, if they passed the censor at the front would rank as official intelligence and it would apply impartially to all papers'. Here rehearsed in 1906 were the principal themes of the later war-time 'drama' between press and government. Mutual agreement on the need of some form of censorship so long as news, the life force of the press, remained untampered with and on tap. There remained the essential problem to be resolved of how to introduce restrictions on a free press which in no way impeded their activities as commercial competitors and patriotic propagandists.

Despite press support for some form of legislation to restrict defence information at a time of national emergency the Liberal Prime Minister Campbell-Bannerman, displaying an awareness of public sensibilities noticeably lacking in his successor Asquith, considered 'that the public which was always anxious for news would be affected as well as the press ...(and) ...such legislation would be opposed in the House of Commons'.[19] The proposed Bill was shelved.

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18. P.R.O. Cab 17/91/B23(b).

19. P.R.O. Cab 2/2 .

Despite this set-back, Brooks and the C.I.D. continued to work for some form of agreement but with the formation of a new press proprietors' association, the Newspaper Proprietors Association, (N.P.A.), a more aggressive attitude emerged amongst the leading proprietors. At a special conference convened by the Institute of Journalists in February 1908 to approve an amended and less drastic version of the proposed legislation of 1906, the Secretary of the N.P.A. 'without warning read a paper strongly condemning the proposed legislation'.[20] The proprietors saw no reason 'why newspaper proprietors and journalists should be engaged in promoting such a Bill' and they ...had become increasingly concerned at being 'the persons who would be chiefly affected by the proposed legislation'. It was ...'their property (which) would suffer in reputation and they would be personally liable to a fine of £1000 and to twelve months imprisonment'.[21] They also saw 'no evidence that material information concerning naval or military matters during time of war has been improperly published in the past'[22] and with such powerful opposition, the Service departments withdrew the proposals. An unidentified comment attached to the C.I.D. minute concerning the conference succinctly summarised official frustration in dealing with the press : 'It may be observed that throughout the negotiations with the Press, which have continued intermittently since 1905, the journalist body has almost universally agreed that some form of control is logical and necessary but has generally objected to the statutory powers contemplated when they are set forth in detail.'.[23]

It was a little after this juncture that Winston Churchill makes his first appearance in this account and two ideas emerge - that of a Press Bureau and the notion of a voluntary system of press censorship - which were both to play a vital part in the story of press censorship during the First World War. In March 1910, as a result of a recommendation of of the Report of the Sub-Committee on Foreign Espionage, Asquith established

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20. P.R.O. Cab.16/27.

21. Manifesto of the Newspaper Proprietors' Association read by Mr Ernest Park at the War News Conference, 6th February 1908. P.R.O. Adm 116/1058.

22. ibid.

23. P.R.O. Cab 16/27, op.cit.

a sub-committee of the C.I.D. with Churchill as chairman with the prime objective of reaching agreement with the press, using the proposed 1906 legislation as a basis for negotiation. The indefatigable Sidney Brooks was again brought in as a go-between, although by this time he had begun to despair of reaching any agreement.[24]

What emerged from the deliberations of this sub-committee was an idea here described by Rear-Admiral Sir Charles Ottley, Clarke's successor as Secretary of the C.I.D. to Brigadier General Henry Wilson, at the time Director of Military Operations at the War Office :'Mr Churchill is evidently strongly of the opinion that some organization for the dissemination of naval and military intelligence of a harmless kind is desirable and it might be considered by the Press as some slight compensation for being muzzled'.[25] Ottley sought and obtained Wilson's cooperation for joint Admiralty/War Office action along these lines.

This organization, soon being described in the minutes as a 'Press Bureau' would be staffed by Service men 'with trained minds (who) would be the only ones to realise what items of information are of value to an enemy and what are not' [26] - no mention, it should be noted, of using any journalists or those with journalistic experience. Ottley believed that if this Bureau dealt liberally with the press, in other words fed it with plenty of stories however innocuous '... it might by indirect means secure in large measure that control which the Naval and Military authorities so greatly desire ...the Press as a whole is patriotic and has no desire to publish information injurious to the national cause and if skilfully handled, it will in all probability come to regard the Bureau as a source of information and a friendly adviser. Consequently even without legislation a considerable measure of the control desired might be attained'.[27] Wilson concurred. Ottley's minute to Wilson is

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24. Brooks at the time was suggesting 'the alternative course ... to get hold of Lord Northcliffe whose influence in the Press was great. This might succeed'. Letter to Ottley, 28th October 1910, P.R.O. Cab 17/91.

25. Ottley to Wilson, 10th June 1910, ibid.

26. ibid.

27. ibid.

illustrative of the Service mentality with regard to the press. While it recognises the basic need the press has for news, it has about it that ring of patronage, of having to deal with a strong-minded, albeit recalcitrant child, an attitude which so infuriated the likes of Northcliffe during the war. It also displayed a naive view of the realities of the newspaper world to believe that such a Trojan Horse would quell the demand for hard news or stem criticism at a time of national emergency however 'skilfully handled'. The idea got no further at this stage but we can note that the idea of a Press Bureau had sprung to life and not be too surprised when it makes its sudden appearance in the first days of the war, seemingly plucked out of the air by 'magician' Churchill.

The second idea which developed before the war and was to play, like the Press Bureau, a vital part in the story of war-time press censorship - that of a voluntary censorship - took firm root at about the time when the Press Bureau idea was being quietly laid to rest in a Whitehall filing cabinet. Press revelations at the time of the Agadir crisis in 1911 had led some Service chiefs to demand press legislation for use in a time of emergency with or without press support.[28] The Morning Post, so anxious to see some form of restrictive legislation in 1906, had on 2nd September 1911, in an article entitled'Guardianship of British Forts'given a detailed account of the defences of many of the coastal fortifications on the East coast.

Sir Reginald Brade, Permanent Secretary at the War Office, was instructed to negotiate with the 'dominant press interests with a view to arriving at some friendly arrangement for regulating the publication of naval and military news'.[29] Brade, whose wisdom and subtlety in dealing with the press, distinguished him from the uninspired and arrogant approach of many of his fellow civil servants, immediately approached Leo Amery, Unionist M.P.

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28. In Brooks letter to Sir Charles Ottley on 28th October 1910 (already cited, f. 23 p.17) he too had urged Ottley to go ahead with a Bill 'with or without press support as this would' save the press from itself'.

29. P.R.O. Cab.16/27.

and former war correspondent and the editor of The Times, Geoffrey Dawson,[30] who advised him 'to secure the cooperation of the proprietors' as these were 'better organised' (than the Newspaper Society) and 'what was more important, had more complete control of the Press'.[31] Brade lost no time in addressing a meeting of the Joint Committee of the Federation of Newspaper Owners who agreed to elect a small standing committee to negotiate with the Service departments 'with a view to preventing the publication of naval and military intelligence, when such publicity could be likely to prove prejudicial to the interest of the country'.[32] There appear to be two reasons for this more conciliatory response from the proprietors - fears, prompted by Brade's visit, of a revived Press Bill and fears over the recently enacted Official Secrets Act. (Sir Charles Matthews the Director of Public Prosecutions, shortly after Brade's address, had interviewed an editor to warn him that in publishing information considered by the Admiralty to be prejudicial to the national interest, he was liable to prosecution under provisions of the new Act).[33]

Two conferences took place in 1912 between Service department representatives and a representative committee of the press comprising the four national Proprietors Federations, a representative of the Agencies and a representative of the Newspaper Society.[34] At the second of these conferences in October 1912, both sides agreed to the establishment of a Joint Standing Committee, the Admiralty, War Office and Press Committee, (to be known as the Joint Committee) and that 'upon reference to it by either department, the Committee should be empowered to decide what information should be withheld from publication and that the press

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30. At this time, he was known as Geoffrey Robinson but changed his surname to Dawson in 1917 in order to benefit from a legacy. As he is better known as Geoffrey Dawson, this title has been used throughout the thesis

31. Cited by Sir Reginald Brade, 'Memorandum on the Formation of a Standing Committee of Official and Press Representatives to deal with the publication of Naval and Military News In Times of Emergency', 5th November 1912, P.R.O. Cab 38/23/6.

32. ibid.

33. This was in breach of an unoffical undertaking given to the House of Commons by the sponsors of the Bill, that the Act was addressed specifically to spies and would not be used against the press. D French 'Spy-Fever in Britain, 1900-15' in Historical Journal, xxi,(1928) p.360.

34. 'The four News Associations represent every newspaper interest in the UK, except monthly and weekly publications, magazines and certain technical papers but steps were taken to get these involved'.Brade Memorandum, op. cit.

would accept and act upon every such decision'.[35] The proprietors agreed that military or naval information should be liable to prohibition if in the opinion of the Joint Committee 'at times of emergency it might be against the public interest to make known'[36] and they also agreed to refer defence information which came to them from other sources to the Service departments for advice as to publication. But they in turn stipulated that the press members of the Joint Committee 'should not be used as a medium for the dissemination of false information or for the purpose of stifling criticism of policy or except in really important cases where national interests were at stake, for the restriction of news'.[37]

Brade had bypassed the need of a formal Press Bill and had astutely emphasised the voluntary nature of the agreement in his dealings with the press. Like the settlement of many industrial disputes, both sides could claim a victorious breakthrough. The press in thinking that they had avoided both a statutory Press Bill and possible prosecution under the Offical Secrets Act (although there was no formal undertaking to this effect in the agreement) and the Service departments, with more justification for celebration, in believing that they would now have more control over the flow of defence material appearing in the press without the opprobrium and limitations of statutory legislation. The departments had got all that they believed they could get in peace-time - the press working ' in conjunction with us'[38] although they still secretly intended in 1912 to control the press by means of a statutory Bill in the event of a war. However, between 1912 and the outbreak of war in August 1914 Defence of the Realm Regulations had been prepared by the inter-departmental committees responsible for the War Book, which as we shall see in Chapter II, made such a Bill unnecessary.

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35. Brade Memorandum, P.R.O. Cab.38, op.cit.
36. ibid.
37. ibid.
38. ibid.

Sidney Brooks who had been so actively involved in the past to bring about an agreement between the both sides, had little faith that his own profession would be capable of abiding by such an arrangement in the time of a real crisis. As he told readers of the Fortnightly Review on 1st April 1913 : 'I have little faith in its durability at a moment of crisis when an excited nation is clamouring for all the news it can get'. Brooks never wavered from his belief that a clearly defined Parliamentary Bill would be needed in time of national emergency so that both sides would know exactly where they stood. He believed that there should be statutory control over what was published or none at all and the experience of voluntary war-time censorship in Britain amply bears out Brooks's argument in this respect.

But it does not bear out his contention that the press were incapable of controlling their appetite for a good story. From the Service departments' view, the 1912 agreement was an outstanding success or, in Sir Reginald Brade's more prosaic language, between October 1912 and August 1914, the Joint Committee 'performed its offices successfully'.[39] At the request of the Joint Committee, no mention was made in the press of War Office excercises involving the detrainment and embarkation of an Expeditionary Force at Southampton in 1912. It prevented reports of increased ordnance work being carried out at Woolwich the following year. But the most outstanding achievement of the pre-war voluntary agreement was the compliance by the press, with a request of the Joint Committee of 27th July 1914 which led to the effective 'blacking out' of the whereabouts of the British Expeditionary Force (B.E.F.) until 18th August 1914 when it had safely reached its destination on the continent.

Thus before the outbreak of war the voluntary element in British press censorship had been firmly established and both the press and Service departments could claim substantial progress since the October 1912 agreement. The Service departments were controlling the flow of published defence material and the press proprietors had stemmed the calls for a statutory Press Bill. But the 1912 agreement was achieved upon the strict understanding by the proprietors that not only was the right

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39. P.R.O. HO 139/17/A682/Part 1/ (26th October 1914).

to criticise to remain sacrosanct but that 'a more adequate supply of information'[40] would be forthcoming in the event of a real national crisis. In 1912 and in the previous periods of negotiation, the press had assumed that war correspondents would accompany any British forces in action. The arbitrary manner in which, at Kitchener's direction, a ban on war correspondents was imposed in August 1914 without explanation and the initial insensitive government control over all press cablegrams poisoned within weeks the cooperative spirit painstakingly built up during the pre-war years. After years of consultation the press was ignored by the government and the very departments which had so assiduously sought their cooperation and the feeling of bitterness and betrayal thus aroused was at the root of much of the war-time antagonism between press and officialdom

Several themes which run through the story of the war-time press censorship can be usefully identified at this pre-war stage. The British press was then predominantly patriotic and imperialist in its attitudes. It had no desire or motive to publish information which could in any way prove harmful to the interest of national security. Resentment and antagonism certainly existed over the evident lack of trust in the press displayed by the Service departments in at first banning war correspondents, then later restricting their number and in the imposition of a cable censorship. But this in no way prevented the majority of proprietors and editors from actively cooperating in the D Notice system and in other officially inspired pro-war propaganda schemes.

But reporting wars and defence subjects does pose a major ethical problem for the press - is inefficiency or personal failure to be accurately reported, which could possibly assist an enemy, potential or otherwise, or are such items to be discreetly suppressed in the interest of patriotism? The case of General Redvers Buller was often cited in Service circles as a man 'done down' because of a bad press over his record

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40. Brade Memorandum, P.R.O. op. cit.

during the South Africa war.[41] In a free society it is a continual dilemma. Should The Times have suppressed Russell's reports from the Crimea, should the Washington Post have published Daniel Ellsberg's tapes about United States policy failures in Vietnam? Doubtless Delane and Bradlee would answer that the press owed society a duty to report such inadequacies in the interest of the greater national good.

But those in authority in the Service departments might argue - yes, investigate and discover any failure but let us advise you on how to present what you find and what should or should not be published in the interests of national security. Delane and Bradlee resisted such pressures, the 'dominant press interests' [42] in Britain prior to the First World War did not. They began to accept Service 'advice' while maintaining an outright hostility to any form of institutionalised government control of the press, a position they maintained in varying degrees throughout the war in their hostility to the Press Bureau.

What the 1912 voluntary agreement represents is not so much a step towards direct government control of the press as its more insidious manipulation and control through the process of official guidance - a trickle before the war, a flood during it. Colonel Seely, Secretary for War, told the annual dinner of the Institute of Journalists in December 1912 that 'it would be a dreadful thing if the Press of England with its high traditions were to be supposed for one instant to be at the beck and call of Downing Street or Whitehall'.[43] The widespread acceptance of official instructions on how to cover stories and what subjects to censor placed the press in just this ignominious position and at the same time greatly entrenched the inclination towards self-censorship. Any agreement between the press and government to suppress information must in the long term be detrimental to the best interests of society and the 1912

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41. It was a view actively put about by Buller himself on his return from South Africa. In a speech to the Queen's Westminster Volunteers on 10th October 1901, he complained that some newspapers 'have devoted more time to finding fault with their countrymen than they have to praising them' and he went on to complain of The Times in particular, which he accused of ganging up on him in an attempt to dislodge him from the Aldershot Command. Derby Papers, 920 Der (17), Liverpool Public Library.

42. Brade Memorandum P.R.O. Cab. op.cit.

43. The Times 16th December 1912.

agreement is no exception. If a free press is restricted and manipulated through a conspiracy of silence and acquiesence rather than subject to openly decided laws, then society will eventually become cynical about what it reads in its press - a situation which had begun to occur in Britain towards the end of the war and continued into the post-war years. Such an agreement inevitably encouraged a decline in the ethical standards of journalism in general and of defence reporting in particular, leading to the current situation in which some defence correspondents are little more than Ministry of Defence apologists.

So far the press has been discussed as if it was a collective, structured organization but this was true in the period under study of only the outer trappings. The various press organizations had come together to negotiate with the Service departments out of mutual fear of restrictive legislation. Such unanimity was rare and the 1912 agreement was observed by most journalists because it appealed to their patriotism rather than to any loyalty to an organisation. The proprietors were organised into federations, the N.P.A. being the most influential and well organised by 1914, primarily because it included in its membership, owners of most of the major Fleet Street newspapers.[44] The journalists were organised within the Institute of Journalists, although by 1914 the National Union of Journalists was gathering new membership and strength at the expense of the I.O.J. But none of these organizations had much control or influence over their membership in what was one of the most individualistic and entrepreneurial of businesses.

There was a profusion of titles, papers were launched, folded or amalgamated with bewildering rapidity and ruthlessness and there was a huge readership eager to be informed and entertained. Northcliffe, a genius at using other people's ideas to create a journalistic empire, had spearheaded a revolution in the press in the years between 1901 and 1914. The staid Victorian journal had all but vanished, the 'Yellow Press' had become firmly established in Fleet Street and the selling of cheap, easy-to-read news had become a ruthless competitive business.

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44. Newspapers represented through the N.P.A. included Northcliffe's Daily Mail, Evening News, Weekly Dispatch and Daily Mirror, leading Unionists papers like The Daily Telegraph and Morning Post, and the two Liberal newspapers, the Daily News and Daily Chronicle.

In 1914, there were 27 dailies, 8 evening papers, 284 weekly or monthly periodicals and 7 Sunday newspapers all published in Fleet Street and distributed nationally.[45] Many provincial dailies and weeklies had offices in Fleet Street and published syndicated feature articles written by Fleet Street columnists. The circulations of the Fleet Street papers varied quite substantially and were by no means related to the political influence a paper wielded. The most prestigious British newspaper, The Times, had a circulation of only 41,000 in 1911 (although under Northcliffe's direction this figure increased dramatically to 278,348 by August 1914).[46] The Westminster Gazette's daily sales in 1914 were 27,000 but it was regarded both at home and abroad as the authentic voice of the Liberal Government, 'undoubtedly commanding a greater weight of influence per reader, having regard to the character of its readers, than any other London paper...'[47] Many of the metropolitan Fleet Street dailies had circulation figures in the 300,000 - 400,000 range although by 1914, Northcliffe's Daily Mail was far ahead of the field with a certified figure of 945,719.[48] But even this figure was eclipsed by the circulation figures of the Sunday press where in 1914 the News of the World was claiming a figure of 1,200,000 and where Northcliffe's Illustrated Sunday Herald in 1915 quickly reached 2,000,000 after only two issues.

With the exception of the two Liberal dailies, the Daily News and Daily Chronicle and the two Liberal evening papers, the Westminster Gazette and The Star, most Fleet Street papers were either straightforward Unionist or inclined to the right of centre in their political allegiance, although there were almost as many Liberal or Left inclined periodicals as Unionist. Although there were,between 1890 and 1910 'almost 800 papers, half of them explicitly socialist, published in the interests of labour',[49]

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45. Newspaper Press Directory, 1914
46. The History of The Times, The 150th Anniversary and beyond, 1912-20. Part 1, Chapters I - XII, (London,The Times Publishing Co. Ltd, 1925) pp. 105-125.
47. Wilson Harris, J.A. Spender (London, Cassell and Co. Ltd,1946) p.29.
48. A.P. Wadsworth, Newspaper Circulations, 1800-1954 in Transactions of the Manchester Statistical Society, Vol LV (1954-5), passim.
49. Deian Hopkin, The Socialist Press in Britain, 1890-1910 in Newspaper History from the 17th century to the present day, George Boyce, James Curran and Pauline Wingate,(eds), (London, Constable & Co. 1978) p. 294.

there was during this period no socialist daily newspaper published in Fleet Street. The Daily Citizen published in Manchester, claimed to be a national daily, but despite the great war-time boon to circulation and finances of most newspapers, including those of the Left, the Daily Citizen folded in June 1915. Socialist papers tended to be monthly periodicals and localized in the industrial areas principally in the North and in Scotland.

The Northcliffe 'revolution' left Fleet Street (and to a lesser extent the provincial press) in a divided state between the new journalism of papers like the Daily Mail - 'a journal produced by office-boys for office-boys'[50] and the survivors of the more sedate nineteenth century papers like the Westminster Gazette, Daily Telegraph and the Daily News. The division was bitter and personal. The old school journalists detested the Northcliffe style and everything associated with it - sensational news gathering, personalized interviews, campaigns and gossip and the continual emphasis on circulations and profitability. A.G. Gardiner, editor of the Liberal Daily News, and very much one of the old school, told Northcliffe in an open letter in the Daily News of 5th December 1914 : 'You have been the most sinister influence that has ever corrupted the soul of English journalism'. Reading the presidential speech of Robert Donald, editor of the Liberal Daily Chronicle to the Institute of Journalists in 1913 is like reading the lament of a defeated warrior fresh from the battlefield gazing bleakly towards an unknown future where 'the old proprietor system has almost disappeared. Instead of individual ownership, we have corporations, private and public'.[51]

Gardiner's 'sinister influence' charge was typical of the double standards exercised by his critics which so infuriated Northcliffe. To meet his commercial challenge, the old style quality papers, including Gardiner's own paper, had sought and obtained financial backing which was little more than outright political subsidy. During the period 1910-1914, The Standard, The Globe, The Observer and the Pall Mall Gazette

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50. Remark attributed to the Marquis of Salisbury, Hamilton Fyfe, Northcliffe, An Intimate Biography (London, George Allen & Unwin 1930), p68.

51. Newspaper Press Directory, 1914.

were all receiving financial support, either directly or indirectly from Unionist Party funds. The Liberal Party through George Cadbury and Lords Cowdray and Murray of Elibank were backing the Westminster Gazette, the Daily Chronicle and the Daily News, - in fact few editors of the so-called quality press in 1914 were free of some form of obligation to party political sponsorship.[52] Northcliffe's great strength was that he was independent of this 'Byzantine network of relationships'[53] which existed between editors and politicians and was thoroughly disliked and feared for being so. These deep and emotionally felt divisions within the press erupted openly at times during the war and many of the disputes and antagonisms in which the Press Bureau became embroiled were to some extent a continuation of this Fleet Street internecine warfare.

Finally the Service departments. Although they provided the initiative for some form of control over published defence material, they were, like the press, by no means a united body pursuing agreed and formulated policies. The strategic disputes and rivalries between the War Office and the Admiralty and later between the Press Bureau and the Service departments, (particularly the Admiralty) were no less bitter and personal because they were conducted behind closed doors. But the departments were generally united in a mutual fear and dislike of the press - fear of reports of personal failure, dislike of an activity considered by Servicemen then (and now) to be a not quite respectable occupation for a gentleman to pursue.

Neither Service were very clear what sort of information constituted useful intelligence for a potential enemy, which is perhaps not surprising given what has been described by one scholar recently as the 'fundamental uncertainty on whether Britain would adopt a maritime or continental strategy'.[54] The impetus for the pre-war negotiations came

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52. See S. Inwood, op. cit.(1971), Chapter 1 passim, for a more detailed account of the relationship between the press and the political parties during this period.

53. Stephen Koss, Fleet Street Radical, A.G. Gardiner and the Daily News (London, Allen Lane, London 1973). p.8.

54. David French, Some Aspects of Social and Economic Planning for War in Great Britain, c. 1905-1915, (Unpublished Ph.D.Thesis, University of London, 1979) p.18.

from the War Office - it was after all the army which had the closest experience of dealing with the problems of censorship and in dealing with journalists in the flesh both in South Africa and in a variety of Colonial fracas. The Admiralty, the senior Service, took a more lofty view of the press both before and during the war leaving the more tedious task of negotiations to the military but constantly demanding to be consulted and insistent on being regarded as the senior partner to any agreement reached.

The Admiralty favoured a pre-war Press Bill along the lines of the Japanese press laws (total government control of all published defence information in time of emergency and complete control over war correspondents). In the words of the First Sea Lord, Prince Louis Battenberg in 1905 : 'My views (of the Press Bill) are those of the Japanese General Staff which means our measures cannot be stringent enough'.[55] It was the Admiralty, faithful to this Battenberg hard-line,which nearly wrecked the 1912 negotiations when Sir Graham Greene (Permanent Secretary at the Admiralty) insisted that the press should submit all defence items which came their way to the Service departments for permission to publish. Only Brade's adroit intervention appears to have averted a press walk-out from the negotiations by suggesting what in fact became the agreed arrangement whereby editors were requested to seek advice on any defence item which in their editorial judgement they considered doubtful for publication.[56] It was the first but by no means the last time that Brade for the War Office was to perform such a service in modifying Admiralty intransigence and repairing bridges between the press and the Service departments.

The military proved to be far more flexible in coping with their natural dislike and distrust of the press than their naval colleagues. A number of senior military commanders began to develop, in the pre-war years, very close personal links with proprietors and editors, much to their mutual benefit during the war. Living in their cloistered

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55. P.R.O. Cab 17/91.

56. Brade Memorandum, op. cit.

world of fleets and ships far from any close civilian contact the sailors remained generally indifferent if not hostile to journalists, regarding such phenomena as war correspondents as a purely military problem. While the War Office by 1916 had established an elaborate press and publicity network, as late as March 1918, despite persistent attempts by Rear-Admiral Sir Douglas Brownrigg, the Admiralty Chief Censor, to improve naval publicity, Hubert Brand, Admiral Beatty's private secretary was writing to Brownrigg from H.M.S. Elizabeth at Rosyth : 'The C-in-C asks me to tell you that he is averse generally to Press visits, lectures, etc. partly because they are a considerable nuisance but principally because they are a source of danger...'[57]

But in one area, that of submarine cable communications, and their strategic implications for an Imperial power the Services were united in an 'extremely professional and competent'[58] manner. In the late nineteenth century, the responsible Inter-Department Committee (the Colonial Defence Committee) displayed not only 'a virtual fetish'[59] for laying 'all red lines' - Service cables independent of the commercial networks - but also a canny regard for the strategic usefulness of censoring press and commercial telegrams.

In 1911 an embryonic system had been established whereby upon government orders for mobilisation, all such commercial telegrams would be subject to a censorship conducted by retired military personnel at the Central Telegraph Office under the direction of the War Office Chief Censor. The censorship was to stop a hostile power communicating with its allies or colonies, to stop spies from sending messages and thirdly to prevent the publication in Britain and the Empire 'of true or false information

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57. Hubert Brand to Sir Douglas Brownrigg, 15th March 1918. P.R.O. ADM 1/8514.41

58. Paul M.Kennedy, Imperial Cable Communications and Strategy 1870-1914 in Kennedy, op.cit, (1979) p.94

59. Kennedy, op.cit. (1978) p.79.

which might exercise a prejudical effect on the population'[60] No legislation was sought empowering such actions as this was thought to be 'disadvantageous from a military point of view as calling attention to arrangements which it is desirable to keep secret'.[61]

Not surprisingly in view of the latter statement, these arrangements were not discussed or disclosed during the pre-war Service/press negotiations, leading to the 1912 voluntary censorship agreement. Between then and the outbreak of war in August 1914 the Services do not appear to have considered any changes to the planned system of cable censorship or of even informing the press of their existence despite the increasing cooperation proffered by the press over defence items. Given the instant cooperation of the press to the request for silence over the movements of the B.E.F., the impact of the cable censorship-delays and confused decisions - together with the surprise ban on war correspondents, came as a rude shock to leading journalists. To ameliorate the press and ensure its continued participation in a voluntary censorship scheme which was close to collapse, as well as to counter some of the wild rumours beginning to circulate, Churchill, the First Lord of the Admiralty announced to the House of Commons on 7th August 1914 the establishment of a Press Bureau '...to provide a steady stream of trustworthy information supplied by both the War Office and the Admiralty'.[62]

But Churchill's statement which had said nothing about the cable censorship, was short and ambiguous,containing no clear definition of the Press Bureau's precise role or powers. Was it a manifestation of the authorities' intention to maintain the pre-war voluntary principles, leaving the press free to criticise and comment about events and policy or was it the first step towards the Continental model of total control of the press during war-time? As we shall see in Chapter II , despite all the pre-war negotiations and planning, in the confused, chaotic days of early August 1914,no-one in Government or in the Service departments seemed at all clear about the issue of press control and press censorship. The Press Bureau and its 'client', the press, were left to come to terms as best they could.

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60. P.R.O. Cab 18/16/4,22nd October 1898 cited in Kennedy, op.cit.(1979)p.91
61. ibid.
62. House of Commons Debates,5th Series,Cols 2153 -56, 7th August 1914.

CHAPTER II

Early Days

The censorship ...'should be handled discreetly and carefully, since it is an exotic in unnatural surroundings; but it should be handled consistently and boldly, for otherwise it does not justify its existence'. Quarterly Review, January 1916.

By June 1914 the Committee of Imperial Defence had prepared a War Book which drew together the pot-pourri of plans arrived at by the two Service departments and other civilian ministries in the event of war or national emergency.[1] A section of this War Book catered for a 'Strained Relations' period in the event of possible hostilities and it was under this heading that the Admiralty and War Office made preliminary censorship arrangements in late July 1914. No direct censorship or control of the press by government or the Service departments was envisaged in the War Book or the need of a Press Bureau.

The Admiralty established a censorship section under Rear-Admiral Brownrigg with a strict notion of secrecy as outlined in the Admiralty section of the War Book : 'It was understood that the Admiralty would be free to take such precautions as long tradition had sanctioned...'[2] War Office plans appeared at least on paper, to take into account recent negotiations with the press. A sub-section of Military Operations, M.O. 5(h) was established with two general staff officers to supervise arrangements for field censorship and with the duty of 'drafting and furnishing to the press suitable communiqués on military organization, the channel of communication being the Admiralty, War Office and Press Committee,(the Joint Committee)'[3] In the event it was this sub-section, far from furnishing 'suitable communiqués' which issued the 'request' on 24 July through the Joint Committee for total press silence on the organization and whereabouts of the British Expeditionary Force (B.E.F.).

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1. 'Military Press Control Part 1,' December 1918 P.R.O. WO32/9304
2. Cited by Julian S. Corbett in History of the Great War - Naval Operations, Vol I.(London, Longman Green & Co., 1920), p.21.
3. 'Military Press Control, Part 1.', op. cit.

On the afternoon of 4th August 1914 the Government, by proclamation, took over the whole system of land telegraphs, submarine cables and wireless stations. The censorship of messages sent by these means, including press cablegrams, was placed in the charge of ninety military censors based at the Central Telegraph Office (C.T.O.) and other telegraph offices in London under Colonel A.G. Churchill of the War Office. On the morning after the British ultimatium to Berlin had expired, the two ends of the German Atlantic cable were cut and the two ends taken into the harbours of Falmouth and Halifax. The fleet was fully mobilised by 3rd August and apart from this and the announcement of Jellicoe's appointment as commander in-chief of the Grand Fleet (5th August), as far as the Admiralty were concerned that was all the public need know about naval activities. From 5th to 12th August the entire B.E.F. embarked for the Continent in a highly efficient logistical exercise involving 1,800 special trains and the despatch of over 250,000 tons of supplies mainly from Southampton. Reporters and editors were aware of this momentous activity yet not a mention was made of it in the press at the time, not even in the local South Coast papers.[4]

But such a ban on news of the B.E.F., coupled with silence from the Admiralty and inevitable delays to press cablegrams due to the inexperience and incompatibility of the mainly retired officers drafted in as cable censors, led to an immediate shortage of 'hard news' and a spate of wild rumours and exaggerated reports. The more celebrated rumours, like those of the presence of Russian soldiers travelling through Britain with snow on their boots or railway signalmen allegedly murdered by German spies, have been well documented and recounted by writers such as Lord Sandhurst and Arthur Ponsonby.[5] But it was not so much absurd rumours of this

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4. Geoffrey Dawson, Editor of The Times wrote to Harold Child on 14th August 1914 : 'It is surely the most extraordinary fact in modern history that 120,000 armed men should leave this country without a word being said about it in the newspapers... Everyone knows what is going on...we have actually in the office a good deal of material which we have rigorously suppressed'. Dawson to Child, 'Dawson' The Times Archive.

5. Lord Sandhurst, From Day to Day (London, Edward Arnold & Co.Ltd., 1928) p.51 Arthur Ponsonby, Falsehood in War-Time (London, George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1928) pp.63-66.

sort as the distorted and wildly exaggerated reporting of war news which concerned the Government and Service Departments and the idea of a Press Bureau was quickly resurrected. Optimism was one thing, a positive assistance in the prosecution of a war. A dream world of victories was another, liable as it was, to lead to an instant shattering of morale, if things went wrong. Many newspapers and journals wrote up the opening days of the war solely in terms of an outstanding Allied victory and an unmitigated disaster for the Central powers - faith replaced facts for many journalists in those early days of the war, a trait they shared with the commanders of the Allied forces in the Western theatre of operations.[6]

The attempt of Von Bülow's 2nd Army on 5th August to storm the Belgian fortress of Liege was poorly executed and resulted in heavy German losses. This setback was seized upon by most sections of the British press as a clear sign of imminent German collapse. The Daily Mail's main headline for 8th August ran: '25,000 Germans Killed' followed by this opening paragraph : 'It is certain that the Germans have received a grievous blow....they have opened the war with a reverse (which has)....destroyed the morale of....their best army corps'. The main news column in the Liverpool Daily Post was headed 'Victorious Belgians/Germans defeated at Liege/Severe German Losses/Request for Armistice'. The Manchester Guardian headlined 'German Losses in Desperate Attack on Liege/Berlin makes Admission'. The Scotsman in a leader quoted the Belgian Minister of War as saying that the German losses were becoming 'enormous' and concluded that 'Time is against Germany and on the side of her enemies in the field' (7th August). At a time when the German 7th army in Lorraine was inflicting a severe rebuff to French 1st Army forces who had attempted to apply the offensive doctrine so beloved by the French High Command, the Weekly Dispatch on 9th August ran the banner headline : 'Seven German Regiments Surrender' : 'Yesterdays news', its main story went on, 'confirmed and threw further light on the severe reverse the Germans have sustained during their first encounter ...

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6. For an accurate and very readable account of the blind optimism which often confused the actions and decisions of the Anglo/French High Command, see John Terraine, Mons (London, B.T, Batsford, 1960), passim.

in France'. The next column on its main news page described the scene at Liege, (where the Germans were well on their way to taking all the forts), as 'German troops lying feet deep in the trenches'.

Isolated incidents of German setbacks were written up as major defeats and French and Belgian reverses generally ignored or glossed over - a practice not confined to the popular press. The very few French advances at the time were understandably written up as outstanding achievements heralding the inevitable collapse of German militarism : The Manchester Guardian headed a piece about the French occupation of Mulhouse in Alsace as 'Germany Hard Pressed'(10th August) and on 12th August a main news story headed 'Extraordinary Rumours/from Berlin/ Anti War Disturbances' which was nothing more than a series of comments from an unnamed French deputy. Repington, military correspondent of The Times quoted Napoleon to allay his readers' fears when the Germans entered Brussels, : 'there was no glory in entering the undefended capital of an enemy country', (21st August). At a time when the French army was losing 300,000 men in Lorraine, the Saturday Review uncritically quoted the French Ministry of War statement that 'it was an affair of outposts - a fight with only one division on either side' (15th August).

The prize for this class of rose tinted reporting must surely go to Reynolds's Newspaper which on the 16th of August with the Germans having taken the forts at Liege and on their way to Brussels reported that 'The Belgians are reported to have lost fewer than 200 killed and wounded and the Germans are now reported in retreat'. A small paragraph on an inside page warned its readers to beware of 'the current vogue in false rumours'. Such roseate reporting indicates the national paranoia about Germany which simply had to believe that the Germans could be beaten, that their superior and efficient methods were not invincible when pitched against the intuitive genius of the French and British races. The Nation on 8th August illustrated this mood of national insecurity with the hopeful comment that 'the B.E.F. Corps would perhaps be able to...tax the superior training, higher intelligence and the more scientific leadership of the Germany army'.

The establishment of what was in effect a two-tier press censorship - a voluntary one supervised by the Joint Committee and an obligatory cable censorship, as well as Admiralty insistence on controlling the issue of all official war bulletins quickly led to chaos in Fleet Street. Journalists were forced to wait outside the room of Sir George Armstrong, an Admiralty censor, for such snippets of news as the Admiralty considered suitable for publication. In France and Belgium, no journalists were allowed within miles of the front lines and apart from the often absurdly optimistic French and Belgian War Ministry statements, were obliged to rely on Parisian gossip or impressions from stragglers to meet their deadlines. Editors began to besiege the Joint Committee for guidance over censorship decisions and for reliable news of the war. But in the words of an official report on the censorship issued later on in the war, 'it was not, however, possible during war-time for the greatly increased volume of work to be dealt with by this committee, the official members (Servicemen) of which had other duties to perform'.[7]

Churchill, First Lord of the Admiralty and a former war correspondent, seems to have recognized in his pre-war idea of a Press Bureau, the answer to these problems and as the Minister most concerned with the pre-war negotiations with the press, was able to convince his Cabinet colleagues of the urgency of its establishment. The Bureau would take over the Joint Committee's role as the guiding light of the voluntary censorship undertaken by the press itself,'a difficult and thankless task'[8]which was to be sweetened by having 'the duty of supplying from time to time, for publication in the press official news which the departments themselves had previously intended to transmit direct to the newspaper editors.'[9] Churchill told the House of Commons on the 7th of August 1914 that a Press Bureau had been established which would 'provide a steady stream of trustworthy information supplied by both the Admiralty and the War Office'.[10] But because both the press

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7. 'Memorandum on the Official Press Bureau', March 1915, British Parliamentary Papers,(Cd. 7680), p.4.
8. ibid.
9. ibid.
10. House of Commons Debates 5th Series, 7th August 1914, Cols 2153-56.

and the Services had conspired to keep the 1912 agreement a secret Churchill said nothing to the Commons about the Bureau's principal task of replacing the Joint Committee as a censorship authority. To further obfuscate matters, the Committee was to remain in existence as an intermediary body and its Secretary to continue to distribute the confidential Notices to the press.

Churchill told the House of Commons that F.E. Smith, a K.C. and leading member of the Unionist Opposition, was to 'preside over' the Bureau. No details of the precise role or powers of the Bureau were announced by Churchill and statements by Government Ministers further confused matters with contradictory and erroneous explanations. Kitchener, when asked by Sir George Riddell, chief proprietor of the News of the World and Secretary of the N.P.A., what were to be the duties of the 'Press Censor' declared magisterially : 'He will see that nothing dangerous goes into the newspapers. Go away and settle the matter with Brade. We must make the English people understand that we are at war and that war is not pap."[11] Thus with characteristic perspicuity Kitchener envisaged both a repressive and propagandist role for the press censorship which it was soon to adopt.

On 8th August the day after Churchill's statement, McKenna, the Home Secretary,portrayed the Bureau as a vast, all powerful Ministry of Information. Questioned in the House of Commons by Mr Joynson-Hicks about a story in that day's Daily Mail of a fictitious naval battle off the East coast which as Joynson-Hicks said 'appears to be absolutely untrue in every detail', McKenna condemned 'the fabrication of false news ... which might be wilfully done for the purpose of assisting the circulation of a newspaper' and went on boldly to expound that 'the public have a reasonable right to expect that no news will be published except such news as is furnished through the Bureau.'[12] It was a preposterous commitment for a Home Secretary to make when at that moment Smith had not yet been allocated a staff or premises

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11. G.A.Riddell Lord Riddell's War Diary,1914-18(London, Nicholson & Co., 1933) p. 10.

12. House of Commons Debates, 5th Series, 8th August 1914, Cols.2201-2203.

to work from. Asquith, in contrast, narrowed the range of the Bureau's activities to that of 'the official mouthpiece of all military and naval information' and made a stab at defining the principle upon which such information was to be distributed. This was that 'all information which can be given without prejudice to the public interest shall be given fully and at once'.[13] Churchill had made no mention of censorship and when Mr Tennant, Under-Secretary of State for War, was asked on the 25th of August if a press censorship had in fact been established, he side-stepped the question by stating that the press were to refer to the Service Departments if in doubt.[14] These seemingly off-the-cuff Ministerial statements reflect the ad hoc nature of the Press Bureau's early days for as Mr McCallum Scott complained to the House on 31st August, 'it is a remarkable fact... that there has been no full and precise definition of the objects and functions and powers of the Bureau...many difficulties and embarrassments have arisen...owing to this misunderstanding'.[15]

Lord Haldane, the Lord Chancellor, answering this and other criticisms of the Bureau in the House of Lords later that same day and aided no doubt by years of experience as a philosopher identified the crux of the problem of definition and powers as far as the Press Bureau was concerned : 'There is no existing legislation by which Parliament has control over the Press and on the whole it has not been necessary'.[16] Haldane went to point out that the press, like every other section of society was subject to the Defence of the Realm Act (D.O.R.A.) Regulations approved by Parliament on 8th August 1914.[17] The Regulations which were of particular concern to the press, although not specifically directed towards it, were Regulations 18,27 and 51. Regulation 18 forbade the collection, and publication of any information, military or naval, of possible use to an enemy; regulation 27 forbade

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13. House of Commons Debates, 5th Series, 27th August 1914, Cols 150-152.
14. House of Commons Debates, 5th Series, 25th August 1914, Cols 8-10.
15. House of Commons Debates, 5th Series, 31st August 1914, Cols 502-3.
16. House of Lords Debates. 5th Series, 31st August 1914, Cols 560-562.
17. P.R.O. Public General Statutes (4 and 5 Geo 5), Chapter 29.

the spread of false reports likely to cause disaffection among the armed forces or likely to prejudice Great Britain's relations with its allies; and regulation 51 which gave powers to the Competent Military Authorities to search any premises where breaches of the Regulations were suspected. Until May 1915,offences against the Regulations, under Section 1 of D.O.R.A., were to be tried by court martial (with maximum penalties for conviction of life imprisonment) or in minor cases by Courts of Summary Jurisdiction.

With such all embracing powers (on paper) it was hardly necessary for the Government to have drafted specific regulations to suit the press. There never was a legal definition of the powers or functions of the Bureau throughout the war nor was there any public attempt made to define what was meant by press censorship. The Bureau was a hybrid creature, trailing behind the legal tail-coats of its mainly unsympathetic Service masters. It had no legal existence or authority and could act only through them against newspapers considered to have transgressed the regulations. As we shall see in Chapter V in most cases, by the time the War Office or Admiralty had been persuaded to initiate a prosecution, the moment had passed for a likely conviction. The Regulations left the press free of any obligation to submit copy and a breach of any instruction or advice from the Bureau was not in itself an offence. In other words press censorship was essentially voluntary in principle. If a paper published a piece, without submitting it to the Bureau, which was then considered by the Bureau or any Government Department to be a breach of the Regulations, it was then left exposed to the full force of the law. Thus editorial judgement played a major part in the censorship operation and hence the Bureau's continual emphasis in its dealings with the press upon what it saw as its role of protector of press liberties.

F.E.Smith appears to have been given very imprecise instructions as to how the censorship was to function but his behaviour towards the press in his brief sojourn as Director of the Bureau sharpens the picture of confusion that existed within the Bureau in its early days as it veered between the two poles of repressor and protector. Smith

had been one of the few front bench Unionists in favour of joining a coalition in August 1914 and his appointment, which according to The Times was greeted with 'some laughter from the Ministerial members' (18th August) appears to have been a gesture by the Government towards national wartime unanimity. Initial press reaction to his appointment veered from the plain puzzlement : 'The choice of Mr.F.E Smith ...seems curious...' (Manchester Guardian , 8th August) to the downright eulogistic : '...a better selection could not have been made. His acute mind and steady judgement will be brought to bear in a department that will need to be controlled with a sensitive appreciation both of public requirements and national interests. All the qualities necessary for this delicate and important task of distributing authentic war news to the Press will be found in the Member for Walton' (Liverpool Daily Post and Mercury, 8th August 1914).

The Daily Post could not have been more prescient in its appreciation of the qualities necessary for a Director of the Press Bureau or more mistaken in attributing them to F.E.Smith. It was a delicate post requiring both a high degree of administrative ability to graft a totally new, undefined and ramshackle presence upon the Whitehall fabric and a cool, tactful approach to gain the respect of a suspicious and potentially hostile press. The appointment of Smith, a celebrated lawyer and politician, was bold and imaginative but in this case disastrous and within two months, Smith had resigned.

Smith was held responsible in the public mind for aspects of the censorship operation, such as cable censorship and the calibre of the censorship staff, which were not his direct responsibility but he compounded his problems and those of the Bureau's with irrational judgements and bad tempered behaviour. He failed to master the organizational complexities of the situation he inherited and he treated the press, with an arrogance bordering on contempt. His was the case of a man who had fought his way to the top of his profession free from any concern about public opinion who was not agile enough to adjust to the demands and compromises necessary in running a government agency exposed to public glare and Parliamentary criticism and where patience and good humour are as essential as a sharp mind.

He was given a staff of three secretaries and a few semi-retired officers as naval and military censors with no rules for their guidance other than general instructions received periodically from the War Office and Admiralty.

The Bureau began its life at 40, Charing Cross Road in totally inadequate premises in view of the large number of journalists who lingered there awaiting the latest official communiqués. The selection of the semi-retired officers was the responsibility of the Service departments and not Smith's but the selection of his brother Harold, was and as his unpaid secretary, he was not a wise choice. Harold Smith's curt manner did not go down well with journalists and led Sir Arthur Markham in the House of Commons to complain : 'I have letters from newspaper editors who complain : that (he)...acts like one of the Kaiser's officers in his dealings with the press'.[18]

Stung by examples of delayed and inconsistent censorship decisions emanating from Charing Cross Road, H.G. Wells widened the target of criticism to include the entire personnel of the Bureau. 'It was' he wrote in The Nation on 5th September 'almost inevitable that the censorship.... should be abandoned to anyone who happened to be left over from the more urgent business afoot...the officials contrived to do a very considerable amount of real mischief by withholding information, mangling important telegrams and snubbing thousands of helpers who were ready to help'.

But the officers at the Bureau were not trained as censors, they were without adequate instructions and guidelines and they were constantly forced to seek advice and decisions from the Service departments which inevitably meant delays and occasionally the withholding of information. But these decisions, particularly in the early days, were taken by the Service chiefs and handed down to the censors at the Bureau, often without reference to the Director of the Bureau, much to the annoyance of Smith and later Directors who had to face the public consequences.

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18. House of Commons Debates, 5th Series, 31st August 1914, Cols. 453-511.

Smith's failure was that he did not explain these problems to the press and although hampered by an inexperienced staff not under his absolute control, he rejected out of hand the suggestion that the Bureau might benefit from the presence of journalists on the staff with the brusque statement that 'it is not part of our function to manufacture news'.[19] His dealings with the press reveal a blunt tactlessness that was out of key with the demands of his post and can hardly have engendered a spirit of cooperation. Dawson, editor of The Times regularly complained of the 'tone' of Smith's letters [20] which is hardly surprising to judge from the letter Smith sent to the editor of a small provincial paper, the Burnley Express about an item published about the East Yorks Regiment's move to Egypt, (a clear but isolated breach of the D.O.R.A. Regulations) : 'You would be well advised before answering this letter ... to take advice as to your legal position in relation to (D.O.R.A. Regulations) as the scandalous nature of your publication is engaging the careful attention of the War Office and the Admiralty'.[21] Such a letter has the ring of a bullying counsel addressing a potential victim in the dock rather than the Director of an agency created according to some of its own claims, to assist and protect the press against the rigours of military justice. The public 'tone' of Smith's statement differed little from the private. When pressed in the House of Commons to answer detailed questions on a censorship question, M.P's were met with a blank refusal and the plea : 'I would point out that I have had no dinner...'[22]

One of the most persistent criticisms of the Bureau throughout the war was that of unfair discrimination. A paper would submit an item for censorship which was then stopped only to discover it published in another and often rival journal which had not sought out the Bureau's

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19. House of Commons Debates, 5th Series, 31st August 1914, Col. 493.
20. Dawson to Smith, 27th August 1914, P.R.O. HO 139/5/A127.
21. P.R.O. HO 139/7/A277/1. There is no evidence in this file of any such 'careful attention' of this case by the Service departments as alleged by Smith but a number of files in the HO 139 series were shredded.
22. House of Commons Debates, 5th Series, 31st August 1914, Cols. 453-511.

'assistance'. It was a problem inherent in any system of voluntary censorship. Under Smith the Bureau took the somewhat legalistic view, that the grievance felt by papers which had suffered because of this should be held against those papers which had failed to submit their copy and not against the Bureau. This attitude infuriated editors and when it was raised in the Commons by Mr Sherwell, the member for Huddersfield, Smith,instead of explaining the difficulties involved in any disciplinary action against offending newspapers adopted a sarcastic, combatitive attitude, describing as 'futile' Sherwell's suggestion that other papers should be warned when the Bureau held up a story submitted by one of their competitors : 'I rejoice indeed that this is the most serious (criticism) which the Hon. Gentleman has thought necessary to bring before the House after five weeks of work in an office for which there was hardly any arrangements' and he invited Sherwell to visit the Bureau 'and tell the House what he thinks of our methods and in what respect he thinks they can be improved'.[23] Such an attitude won few admirers for Smith or the Bureau.

When the Press Bureau was established the censorship of press cablegrams, along with other international cables, remained under the charge of Colonel Churchill and was conducted in a shift system in twelve different cable offices in London. Britain was the telegraphic crossroads of the world and placed in a position of great strategic advantage in being able to monitor all messages from the European Continent to the New World. It was therefore not surprising that such a ramshackle censorship arrangement, undertaken by men with little or no journalistic or telegraphic experience should lead to delayed telegrams, missed deadlines, inconsistent judgements and the firm international belief that telegrams, particularly those from Germany to America, were as Bethmann Hollweg alleged in August 1914 'consistently poisoned'.[24] T.P.O'Connor, an M.P. and well known

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23. House of Commons Debates, 5th Series, 10th September 1914, Col 743.

24. The Times 30th August 1914. At first all messages from Germany to the U.S.A. were being stopped by the C.T.O. censors. After loud protests from across the Atlantic this was soon changed and messages even critical of Great Britain were passed untouched. P.R.O. HO 139/7/A248/ Part I/8. The English Review argued in March 1916 that the press had no reason to complain about the cable censorship because as the British Government had pointed out to all cable subscribers in August 1914, transmission of messages was 'an act of grace' on the part of the British authorities who accepted messages only 'on the understanding that they would be''subject to censorship by the British authorities; that is that they may be stopped, delayed or otherwise dealt with in all respects at the discretion of the authorities and without notice to the senders..." '

journalist and proprietor of The Star although critical of the effects this system was having on public opinion in America, did concede in the House of Commons that no Fleet Street sub-editor with years of experience could hope to get through the 100,000 words a day which passed through the telegraph offices.[25]

Criticism in the national and international press and in Parliament led to a change in the system in early September 1914 after McKenna had been placed by the Cabinet in overall charge of censorship operations following the Amiens Despatch débâcle (to be discussed later in this chapter). Thirty of Colonel Churchill's censors were made specifically responsible for the censorship of press cablegrams and a consultative committee made up of ex-officers, academics and civil servants was procured to guide the censors in cases of major difficulty. Like Smith, who for the first time, was given responsibility, albeit, a joint one with the War Office,for the cable censorship, this committee sat at the Press Bureau in Charing Cross Road while the censors remained at the Central Telegraph Office in the City. 'It is to be hoped', declared D.26 announcing the changed arrangement, 'that in this way the policy of the Censorship will become more consistent and that many of the grievances of the past will be corrected'.[26]

It was a vain hope for the errors, delays and lack of uniformity continued, not surprisingly when Smith and the consultative committee were in separate buildings hampered by poor telephonic communication and when Smith, although now jointly responsible with Major General Callwell of the War Office for the press cable censorship, had never been shown the guide lines upon which the C.T.O. censors operated. 'They are secret in character', Buckmaster,Smith's successor was later told by R.P.Hills, legal secretary at the Bureau, 'we have never seen them in this office although we are supposed to control the Cable censors...'[27] Thus Smith was held publicly responsible for the operation of a censorship, the guiding principles of which he had never seen.

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25. House of Commons Debates, 5th Series, 10th September 1914, Col..739.
26. D. Notice sent to Editors, 8th September 1914, P.R.O. HO 139/6/A149.
27. Hill's Memorandum to Sir Stanley Buckmaster, 27th September 1914, ibid.

The system continued in this bizarre fashion after Smith's departure on 24th September 1914, until at Buckmaster's insistence, on 26th October 1914 the censorship of all press cablegrams was brought under the direct physical control of the Bureau at its new offices in the Royal United Services Institution (RUSI) in Whitehall. Things were not perfect after this, as we shall see in later chapters, but there was a major improvement in efficiency and less criticism of this aspect of the censorship in the press and Parliament.

The pre-war Joint Committee remained in existence after the formation of the Bureau and although Smith became a co-opted member, its relationship with the Bureau was not clearly defined. The Committee's machinery for the issuing of private and confidential warnings to the press on defence matters, known as Parker telegrams was adopted by the Bureau. These became known as D Notices, issued by the Press Bureau usually after close consultation with the Service Departments and were distributed under the supervision of Ernest, later Sir Ernest Robbins, a member of the Joint Committee through the P.A. news agency office, for whom Robbins worked as Manager. Thus again Smith was responsible for a system of news distribution the technical running of which was out of his direct control. Despite the elaborate arrangements, this side of the Bureau's work functioned reasonably well throughout the war even after the 'withering away' of the Joint Committee itself.

In reaction to the establishment of the Bureau which had been unofficially consulted or rather instructed by Kitchener (through Riddell), the Joint Committee issued a notice to the press on 7th August which went straight to the heart of what the press looked for from the Bureau - news in authoritative and plentiful supply and freedom from bureaucratic control. The Joint Committee Notice told editors that 'the Admiralty and War Office have organised a Bureau for the co-ordination and distribution of official news relating to Naval and Military matters concerning the progress of the war which can be made public'. It went on to observe how the press had been complimented on its cooperation with the authorities and that 'if the Press continue to act in this spirit

there will be no necessity for the officials to alter the present voluntary arrangements'.[28] No mention was made of 'censorship' voluntary or otherwise for it was presumed that the press had become accustomed to the voluntary submission of any item it considered doubtful for reasons of defence security. 'Defence security' now became 'war security' and we can see how the system established in 1912 could so easily be adapted to suit the war-time circumstances.

Perhaps taking their lead from this Notice, it was as a source for more reliable information that the Bureau was greeted, where mentioned at all, by newspapers and journals. The Scotsman, the first but by no means the last newspaper to give the Bureau some advice, urged it 'to do something to check an evil (sensationalist rumours) which the more reputable newspapers have, by the exercise of their own discretion, kept within bounds'. (8th August 1914).[29] The Liverpool Post and Mercury similarly emphasised the need to limit 'ill-founded and harmful sensationalism' (8th August 1914). The Merthyr Express, echoing the view of the Bureau taken by McKenna of a powerful Ministry of Information, said : 'all news not authenticated by the Press Bureau must be accepted with the traditional grain of salt'. (15th August 1914). These reactions and others like that of the Manchester Guardian which misleadingly reported that 'a News Commissioner has been formed at the Admiralty' (8th August 1914) and The Spectator which wrongly stated that 'the newspapers are now under control by law' (15th August 1914) illustrate how starved the press felt itself to be of reliable news and how much confusion and misunderstanding surrounded the formation and function of the Bureau in the minds of journalists as well as government spokesmen at the beginning of the war.

Few papers or journals mentioned the issue of censorship but where discussed it was generally given cautious treatment. The Liberal Daily Chronicle with its ear close to the ground warned the government on the day before Churchill's announcement in the Commons, that it was useless to attempt the suppression of information which was already being passed by word of mouth 'and that censorship should only be used when 'the news published would be of service to the enemy' (7th August 1914).

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28. Cited by Riddell, G.A., op cit., (1933), p.2.

29. This somewhat self-righteous attitude had not prevented The Scotsman from publishing rumours 'that there was a battle between the British and German fleets to the South of the Dogger Bank'(7th August) which were totally without foundation.

It was not only Liberals who expressed this fear of a politically motivated censorship. The pro-Unionist Spectator hoped that 'it (censorship) will never be allowed to become a precedent for any attempt on the part of a Government to confuse opinion and facts. It is all too easy for a Government to make use of such an Institution (the Press Bureau) ...if it wants to gain currency and popularity for certain ideas'. (15th August 1914). But these two voices were almost alone in expressing such fears at this stage because as we have seen, editors had been told that the pre-war voluntary arrangements were to continue which, if not pure in terms of journalistic ethics, had worked and were working in practice for, as the Daily Chronicle tacitly admitted, the press were already voluntarily sitting tight on one of the hottest items of news for home consumption, the movements of the B.E.F. It was not political censorship that most newspapers and journals were apprehensive about with the arrival of the Bureau but as a provider and distributor of news, a bureaucratic agency blundering about and upsetting their finely tuned and ruthlessly competitive system.

It was news the press wanted from the Bureau and it was news the Bureau failed to provide in sufficient quantity, speed or consistency that quickly brought down the full force of journalistic rage upon the Press Bureau and its Director F.E.Smith. As soon as the Bureau commenced operations at Charing Cross Road on 12th August, it began to issue bulletins at various and unspecified times of the day written by Admiralty and War Office officials (although published in the name of the Press Bureau) in the style of Whitehall minutes containing the minimum of information expressed in the bleakest of styles and often garnished with the most trivial of details. News of large scale engagements were often summarised in one or two lines. On 14th August, the Press Bureau bulletin at 3.45 p.m. referring to the severe fighting taking place in Lorraine stated (Paragraph 2) that 'At Sade numerous desertions from the German troops are notified. The French have taken many prisoners and captured some machine guns'. Yet Paragraph 8 of the same bulletin contained a ten line report about General Joffre conferring the Knighthood of the Legion of Honour upon a lieutenant of the French Dragoons.

A bulletin referring to the opening engagement of what turned out to be the battle of Mons stated : 'The British forces have successfully reached their new positions ...fighting has gone on more or less continuously but the enemy has not effectually harrassed our operations ...casualties cannot be estimated but are not heavy ...the enemy suffered very heavily'.[30]

Such sparse announcements caused deep resentment and suspicion when further information began to trickle forth usually indicating a less optimistic state of affairs. As The Star said on 27th August 1914 : 'the censor doles out announcements with a verbal frugality which is exceedingly unwise'. The bulletins were not for the most part written by Smith or the Press Bureau staff but came from the Service Departments who in turn took their content and tone from G.H.Q., G.Q.G. or individual naval commanders. Very often, no one at certain periods during or even after a battle is in full command of all that has happened and this was certainly the case in late August with the B.E.F. in daily retreat while fighting sporadic and often intense rearguard actions. Very often at that time G.H.Q. was completely out of touch with what was taking place on certain days which explains the vagueness of certain bulletins.[31] But it was 'the Censor' who was blamed for this even by such far-sighted commentators as Arnold Bennett, who writing in The Nation acknowledged that a lot of the criticism levelled at the Bureau was unfair and should be laid 'at the door of higher authorities'. But even he attributed the Bureau as the sole author of 'these childish bulletins'. The fault was partly Smith's for failing to take the press into his confidence and explain how the bulletins were written by men fighting a war and not waging a publicity campaign. It was also a direct result of the absence of war correspondents near the front line.

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30. Daily Chronicle 25th August 1914.

31. As Field Marshal Sir John French Commander-in-Chief of the B.E.F. complained to Kitchener at the time of the engagement at Le Cateau : 'The French do not keep me sufficiently informed as to the general situation and they try to conceal reverses or compulsory retirements'. French to Kitchener, 25th August 1914, Kitchener Papers, P.R.O. 30/57/49/WA8.

Resentment had already been created by what some papers considered to be the unfair and unnecessary way in which the British press voluntarily suppressed news of the B.E.F. until the official announcement of its arrival at Boulogne a week before . As the Manchester Guardian complained : 'To keep our own people in the dark without deceiving the enemy is doubtful in morals and dangerous in practice,(18th August 1914). The Nation on 22 August was more openly hostile : 'On Monday night(17th August 1914) the Press Bureau, twelve days behind the Belgian and eight days behind the French newspapers, issued a laconic statement that our Expeditionary Force had landed' ...unknown to the British public...Sir John French has become a familiar hero to French crowds'.[32]

Once the restraints were lifted on mention of the B.E.F. so too did editorial restraints on comments and criticism of the censorship operation. The 18th of August marks the end of the Bureau's brief honeymoon period with the British press. Criticism of the press censorship seemed to occur in periodic waves, on occasions clearly orchestrated by an editor or proprietor with an axe to grind or more often by a number of papers reacting to a specific incident and feeding upon each other's indignation. The first of these periodic attacks began immediately after the B.E.F. announcement and involved both an orchestrated campaign and a more widespread, spontaneous reaction to Press Bureau decisions. Of all press critics of the Bureau and of censorship in general the most sustained and virulent emanated from the Northcliffe stable of newspapers, with The Times for once leading this particular pack. The relationship between Geoffrey Dawson, the editor of The Times and the proprietor, Lord Northcliffe was at best an uneasy, fragile affair, which deteriorated during the war to outright hostility. But upon one thing they were constantly agreed,that a press censorship as established by the Government was unnecessary and a hindrance to the efficient prosecution of the war. The essence of their case was that the Bureau however well intentioned, delayed the transmission of war news, in particular news of the heroic deeds of British soldiers,

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32. The criticism was taken up by Sir Arthur Markham in the House of Commons on the 31st of August who described how he had purchased a copy of the New York Herald at Charing Cross Station on 12th August which had contained a report of the departure of the B.E.F. yet British newspapers had remained silent. House of Commons, 5th Series, 31st August 1914, Col. 456-7.

which they argued, had a directly adverse affect on recruitment and the fighting morale of the British public.

The first campaign against the Bureau was very much a Times affair and was about the effects of the decision to ban war correspondents. Criticism of this had been stifled mainly because it was not clear for a while whether the decision was a temporary one connected with the movements of the B.E.F. When it became plain that the ban was to be a permanent one involving all the Allied armies, The Times fired the opening round of a long press campaign which resulted in the compromise decision in May 1915 of the appointment of five war correspondents at G.H.Q. In a leader on 19th August, bearing all the hallmarks of the Times assuming to speak for and understand the nation's feelings it declared : 'Now the veil is down once more and our anxious people are informed that they can be told nothing ...the suspense thus imposed upon the nation is almost the hardest demand made by the authorities and with some misgivings we trust it may be patiently borne'.

The bleak Press Bureau bulletins of late August brought a two-pronged attack on 26th August. Repington, their prestigious military correspondent who perhaps should have known better, given the rapidly changing situation in France at the time, wrote a piece arguing that 'if the Government desire to receive that support from the public without which the war and recruiting would both languish, they must issue ... more of the doings of our people at the front'. The leader that day written as most of the principal ones were at this period by Lovat Fraser,[33] broadened the attack : 'If (the press) asks for better news and more skilful censorship it does so in the public interest. Influences are at work which do not fully comprehend the psychology of the nation ... Britons cannot forever cooperate with unrestricted enthusiasm in a war they cannot see and about which they are denied all knowledge ...We know little of Mons yet the French press is full of details of our

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33. Dawson wrote only five leaders during the first five months of the war and none during the first six weeks, Sir Evelyn Wrench, Geoffrey Dawson and our Times, (London, Hutchinson & Co., 1955), p.120.

soldiers' great deeds ...this failure to tell the nation what was happening was bound to affect recruiting'. It was not only the British nation but the British Government also which was virtually 'denied all knowledge' of what was going on in France. Sir John French's telegrams to the War Office and the Cabinet at this time were confused and misleading to the extent that by the end of the month Kitchener and senior members of the Cabinet were beginning to have serious doubts as to the mental condition of the British Commander-in-Chief, obliging Kitchener to make his notorious trip to France to see French. It is not surprising then that official announcements were so sparse.

Then occured an incident, so graphic of the chaos that surrounded press censorship in the early months of the war and which led to the second and more widespread press attack on its operations, that it is worth recounting in detail. On the afternoon of Saturday the 29th of August The Times news desk received a despatch by courier from France, date lined 'Amiens, 28th August' written by Arthur Moore, an experienced foreign correspondent. Dawson was at Hatfield House for the week-end and George Freeman, Acting Editor and Wickham Steed, Foreign Editor, read the despatch with some incredulity for not only did it vigorously attack recently published French High Command reports as 'childish prattle'but it went on to give the first news of a massive British retreat (from Mons).

Referring to official bulletins issued in Paris describing the situation, Moore wrote that 'It seemed incredible that a great people should be so kept in ignorance of the situation it had to face... it is important that the nation should know and realise certain things'. Moore went on to tell 'the bitter truths' of a 'retreating and broken (British) army' whose 'losses are very great' and which had not received sufficient support from the French forces on its right. Having described the German machine guns as 'of the most deadly efficiency and very numerous, Moore softened the blow slightly by describing German losses as 'colossal' and emphasising that there had been no failure of (British) discipline'. At the same time, the Northcliffe Sunday paper

the Weekly Dispatch received a similar 'plain tale of misfortune and defeat' from their special correspondent Hamilton Fyfe recounting in more lurid detail than Moore, his meetings with 'cheery but defeated Tommies' who 'had been set an impossible task'. Like Moore he appears fully aware of the explosive nature of his story and in words directed as much to his editors as to the Government he declared 'Let us not try to hush up the facts...'

As far as the operation of press censorship is concerned it is instructive to observe the reaction to these dispatches in Fleet Street. As the law stood both papers could have published the story without official approval. They would then have been open to prosecution if the Government subsequently decided that publication of the dispatches constituted a breach of the D.O.R.A. Regulations. Neither newspaper had any desire to wander into such unknown and potentially risky territory, especially at The Times with Dawson away. Thus quite independently, for no paper even in the same group would share such a scoop, both papers submitted their dispatches, having censored them first, as in Moores dispatch where all mention of German atrocities had been deleted.

Freeman and Wickham Steed had little doubt that the dispatch would be stopped but not only was their scepticism unfounded and the dispatch returned a few hours later passed for publication but it was clear to them from the copy that the decision had been taken by F.E.Smith himself. Smith had not only censored a few sentences but had added a paragraph stressing the need of immediate reinforcements to be sent to France. In a signed note explaining his actions he asked The Times to'forgive my clumsy journalistic suggestions but I beg you to use the parts of this article which I have passed to enforce the lesson - re-inforcements and re-inforcements at once'.[34] The Times took this to be virtually a Government order as did the Weekly Dispatch which had received a similar note from Smith and both published their respective stories on Sunday

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34. The History of 'The Times' op. cit (1952) facsmile facing pp.182-3.

30th August. A furious row followed publication which brought in its trail a swingeing press onslaught against the publishers, (especially The Times) and about the general running of the Press Bureau, leading to the early departure of F.E.Smith.

Dawson returned to London on Sunday to find a summons to appear before Kitchener who soundly berated him for publishing Moore's dispatch and 'requesting' him to feature prominently a Press Bureau bulletin prepared by the War Office which with the hindsight of history gives a far more accurate account of the events after the engagement at Mons than either of the garbled and histrionic messages of Moore and Hamilton Fyfe. The War Office issued through the Press Bureau a statement accurately pointing out that the German attempt with far superior numbers to force the British forces into the fortress of Maubeuge had failed, that the necessary retirement of the B.E.F. had been carried out 'in good order though with serious losses' and also again quite truthfully that 'German losses were out of all proportion to those which we have suffered'. The Press Bureau, now thoroughly alarmed at the row building up, issued at the same time a statement saying that it was allowing the publication of reports from special correspondents so long as no names or military organizations were mentioned but 'these messages ...should be received with extreme caution. No correspondents are at the front and their information (that of the special correspondents) however honestly sent is derived at second or third hand from persons who are often in no condition to tell a coherent story and who are certain to be without the perspective necessary to construct or understand the general situation'.[35]

The Times in a leader the following day, Monday 31st August, tacitly acknowledging Kitchener's personal involvement in the War Office statement, emphasised that the Allies were still holding back the enemy, that recent events were in no way the decisive blow needed by Germany and taking up the optimism inherent in the War Office statement

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35. The Times 1st September 1914.

in contrast to the more sombre impression created by their own special correspondent on the spot reminded its readers that 'for every step, Germany pays a high price in blood'. Such a demure posture was of course too late to save it from the deluge of self-righteous criticism heaped upon it in that morning's papers.

It was the War Office statement issued through the Bureau which gave other newspapers a chance to hammer The Times and Weekly Dispatch (and through them, Northcliffe) for what had been a superb scoop thus reviving the pre-war press rivalries and antagonisms. It was a scoop rapidly turning into a nightmare. The Morning Post calling for tougher censorship regulations, described London as 'tortured last night by a newspaper report...published with the dubious prestige of a name once illustrious in English journalism' (31st August). The Nation described Moore's dispatch as 'an article calculated to disturb and distress the public mind' but the Press Bureau had 'happily shown (that) the story is in all its essentials false'. (31st August). The Scotsman believed the dispatch 'should have been instantly suppressed. It gave a most alarmist and totally erroneous report of the condition of the British troops' and in a neat Caledonian thrust at the decadent South it went on : 'Circulated ...throughout the country on Sunday, it created anxiety and distress not only in London which is easily moved to panic but in other centres as well'.(31st August).

The issue was raised in Parliament the same day (31st August) both in questions to Asquith and during the Adjournment Debate. Asquith, while describing the stories in The Times and Weekly Dispatch as 'very regrettable exceptions...to the patriotic reticence of the Press', refused to be drawn into any discussion about the Press Bureau but promised that 'steps were being taken to improve the supply of news from the front'.[36] But Smith, in a thoroughly bad-tempered defence of the general operation of the press censorship later that day during the Adjournment Debate, made matters far worse for himself and the reputation of the Bureau by attempting to place the full responsibility for the publication of the dispatches upon the editors concerned.

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36. House of Commons Debates, 5th Series, 31st August 1914, Cols 372-74.

Smith said that had he been given more time he would have written to the editor (of The Times) asking 'whether he considered it a wise article to publish ...quite apart from the legal powers we possessed... I have no doubt whatever that he would have suppressed the article'.[37] In view of his letters to both editors begging them to publish, such a rendering of events, even for a lawyer was perverse, if not downright misleading.

Stung by these remarks the Northcliffe entourage launched into the attack. The Daily Mail on 1st September published a facsimile of Smith's note requesting publication of Fyfe's dispatch (propriety prevented The Times from doing likewise) and the Evening News that same day described Smith's remarks as showing 'either complete ignorance of the facts or an indulgence in party or professional spite... painful to contemplate'.[38] The Times in an angry leader obliquely attacking Smith, supported the idea of a censorship in war-time 'as a valuable support to the press...' but the censor The Times wanted (unlike the present incumbent) would be 'a censor with real military knowldege and in close touch with the military authorities...' As for the Amiens Despatch, they had been requested to publish it and if they had not done so 'we should have failed in our public duty'. (1st September 1914).

These attacks and revelations devastated what little was left of Smith's credibility as Director of the Bureau and he remained there for only two more weeks. They did nothing either to encourage confidence in the voluntary submission of copy although there is no evidence that newspapers refrained from doing so. The Scotsman in a view representative of the majority of the newspapers and journals looked at, related the Amiens Despatch incident to the general performance of the Press Bureau which it considered to be : 'capricious, hesitating and obviously governed by no leading principle ...it is impossible to feel that the Press Bureau

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37. House of Commons Debates, 5th Series 31st August 1914,Col. 467. The History of The Times described Smith's statement as 'regrettably ambiguous' Vol. IV, The 150th Anniversary and beyond,1912-20 (London . The Times Publishing Co., 1952). p.226.

38. It was upon Smith's legal opinion that Lever had successfully taken Northcliffe to court on libel charges in 1907. Pound & Harmsworth, Northcliffe (London, Cassell & Co., 1959) p.303.

is performing its work efficiently.' (31 August 1914). Some papers, like The Globe and the Westminster Gazette published apologies for their attacks upon The Times and Sir Arthur Markham, M.P. wrote to the paper on the 3rd of September saying : 'The Prime Minister owes you an apology for the attack made upon your journal...your action has been completely vindicated'. Even the Liverpool Daily Post and Mercury normally adulatory in its references to the Bureau admitted 'that on the whole the Bureau has not fulfilled the expectations formed of it on the strength of Mr Churchill's statement'. (1st September 1914).

This early controversy illustrates the anomalous position of the Bureau and the delicacy needed for its operation. It was dependent on information coming from the Service Departments to perform its function as a source of reliable news and it was dependent on the press for their voluntary submission of copy to perform its role as censor. The staff of the Bureau regularly complained throughout the war of being caught in this invidious position exposed to the fire of both parties. The Amiens dispatches gave Smith and the Bureau the chance to act independently on their own initiative for all the evidence suggests that Smith consulted no-one over his decision. The result was a lamentable fiasco and a major set-back in terms of the Bureau's ambition of becoming an independent department with authority of its own.

Few newspapers emerge from the affair with much credit either. Moore and Fyfe's dispatches were as uncritically dismissed as the War Office statement was incredulously accepted. As it happens the statement was a fairly accurate appraisal of the situation in France whereas the two dispatches were distorted and misleading. But most newspapers came to that conclusion more by blind faith than critical judgement. There is little to admire either in the attitude of newspapers like the Morning Post which were highly critical of the censorship when it affected them but were only too anxious to see its powers fortified and used against its rivals. The whole affair reflects the fragile and insecure state of public opinion in Britain at this time which turned savagely upon any messenger who dared to bring news of defeat.

A theme running through the criticism of the Bureau in both the press and Parliament was that such an incident would not have occured had fully accredited war correspondents been on the spot. Mr Llewellyn Williams, in a neat summary of this argument, asked Asquith on 11th August if 'the Government will return to the time-honoured practice and allow press correspondents to accompany our army to the front...for...if the glorious traditions of our Armies are to be maintained then the public must get to know, not through any official documents but...in the yellow and rhetorical descriptions given by correspondents from the front, what really occured'.[39] Asquith in line with other Government spokesmen on this subject echoed pre-war service doubts as to 'whether (this) is the best way under the altered conditions of modern warfare of dealing with the matter.[40]

'The Press lives by disclosure'[41] said Delane but there could be no disclosures or action-packed stories of British heroism without correspondents. Instead the press had to rely on the opaque official accounts or upon the roving correspondents like Moore and Fyfe As the Westminster Gazette stated : '...the veto on correspondents at the front throws us back on stories obtained at second or third hand not at the front and likely to be coloured and exaggerated' (1st September 1914). Newspapers had assumed under the terms of the pre-war voluntary arrangement that war correspondents would accompany any British forces and that their copy would be censored in the field as in South Africa. Correspondents had been engaged, kitted up and were idling their time in Fleet Street offices much to the chagrin of profit conscious managers and proprietors. But they could expect little sympathy for their predicament from Kitchener the man who had once described war correspondents as 'drunken swabs'.[42]

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39. House of Commons Debates, 5th Series, 31st August 1914, Cols. 372-4.
40. ibid.
41. The History of The Times, Vol IV op.cit. (1952) p.420.
42. Paul Ferris, House of Northcliffe (London, Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1971) p. 38.

Nor was the press alone in assuming that correspondents would be at the front. As Hankey, Secretary of the C.I.D. in the years immediately before the outbreak of war wrote later : 'the arrangements for Press correspondents in the field were fully worked out by the War Office but when war broke out, did not appeal to Kitchener and for some time remained a dead letter'.[43]

Kitchener defended his decision to ban correspondents on the grounds that Joffre had forbidden correspondents to accompany the French forces and that he had little option but to fall in line with Britain's senior ally in the field. But as he later admitted to Riddell, his rapid and wholehearted concurrence with Joffre's decision, without consultation with the Joint Committee or his own officials, indicated how much he shared the orthodox, Service attitudes to the press.[44] It is also an early example of the negative effect of Kitchener's remoteness from what had been going on at the War Office in the years immediately prior to the war. What aggravated the annoyance felt by newspapers was that they were never officially informed of the ban, its reasons or its duration, very much a hallmark of Kitchener's method of business. At first, freelance journalists like Philip Gibbs, Moore and Fyfe operated close to the scene of operations unofficially, treated as one journalist later wrote '... as pariah dogs. They might escape arrest so long as they kept out of sight...'[45] After the furore of the Amiens dispatch, the army rounded up most of these and sent them back to England.

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43. M.Hankey, The Supreme Command, (London, G. Allen & Unwin, 1961) p. 114

44. Kitchener told Riddell in 1915 that he considered the proximity of newspaper men had a potentially bad effect on soldiers' morale : 'An officer will make friends with a correspondent who will write him up with the result that demands for promotion come from home when the man has done nothing deserving promotion. This is prejudicial to the morale of officers who come to think that the way to promotion is through the Press....'G.A. Riddell, op. cit., (1933) pp.79-80. Kitchener was in a good position to make such a comment having been written up as a national hero by G.W. Steevens of the Daily Mail in With Kitchener to Khartum (London, William Blackwood & Sons, 1900). Chapter VI passim.

45. C.E. Montague, Disenchanted (London, Chatto & Windus, 1922) p. 94.

Because of the uncertainty surrounding the issue, the decision about war correspondents was not at first taken up by the press or where mentioned was either welcomed as a sign of government resolve Spectator(15th August), Saturday Review (22nd August) or viewed as a purely temporary affair Manchester Guardian (12th August). But after several weeks of 'war in the dark'(The Times 5th September 1914) the Amiens dispatch incident ignited the fires of indignation felt by most sections of the press over the issue of correspondents. The Liberal press was concerned at the political aspects. The Daily Chronicle considered it 'an insult to a free and enlightened democracy...entitled to be told the truth' that there were no war correspondents at Mons to describe the events there in 'vivid prose' (31st August 1914). H.V. Nevison, himself a veteran of the South African and other campaigns, argued in The Nation on 12th September that the war correspondents performed a vital service to democracy, referring to the achievements of Russell and Archibald Forbes. The Northcliffe press maintained an almost daily barrage of protest in early September. The London Evening News was the most vociferous with banner headlines like 'When Silence is Not Golden' (4th September) and 'A Protest against Secrecy' (5th September) referring to a letter in The Times from Alfred (Vicount) Milner, the former colonial administrator and future member of Lloyd George's cabinet who had called for the appointment of correspondents. The Times accused the censorship authorities of trying to destroy 'enthusiasm for the war...we have received infinitely more information...from Petrograd'. (5th September).

The decision about war correspondents struck at the heart of Fleet Street - action and drama sold newspapers. It was 'the censorship' that was blamed, not in the main Kitchener or the War Office. It was upon the Press Bureau and its director that the abuse over lack of information was heaped, for a decision like others of concern to the press, for which it was not responsible. The Evening News on 5th September had called for 'one or two highly skilled men representing no particular paper but the British press as a whole' to be allowed to accompany the British forces in France. Several days later, partly as a result of the clamour in the press and partly due to Mckenna's more active involvement in the affairs of

press censorship, a Colonel Ernest (later Sir Ernest) Swinton, the author of several books about the South African campaign which had won the approval of both Kitchener and Churchill[46] was appointed as an anonymous 'Eye Witness' to provide 'prompt and authoritative information of what is happening at the front'[47] But his appointment and performance did nothing to meet the call by the press for fully professional, accredited war correspondents.

It did nothing either to retrieve F.E. Smith's credibility and personal confidence as Director of the Press Bureau. When Lord Crewe suggested he take up a 'very important duty' on the staff of the Indian Army 'to look after the despatch of men to India', [48] Smith happily resigned as Director on the 25th of September. He left unlamented and temporarily discredited. The measure of hostility he had engendered in the press during his brief stay at the Bureau can be judged from the acerbity of this Manchester Guardian leader written nine months after his departure, in response to rumours of his return to government office : 'He had the chance a little time ago as head of the newly formed Press Bureau - a very important office requiring for its proper discharge, common sense. A more complete and disastrous failure than his, when thus tested, it would be difficult to recall...' (20th May 1915).[49]

Smith's departure is a suitable point in the story of war-time press control and censorship to summarise its somewhat shaky start before examining the functions and powers of the Press Bureau in greater detail. The Bureau was born out of panic and its early history is the

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46. E.D. Swinton had taken the pseudonym 'Ole Luk-Oie'. His most celebrated book set in South Africa and republished during the war was The Green Curve (Edinburgh, William Blackwood & Sons, 1915). He subsequently became Chichele Professor of the History of War at Oxford (1925-43).

47. House of Commons Debates, 5th Series, 31st August 1914, Col.372.

48. Crewe to Kitchener, 20th September 1914,Kitchener Papers, P.R.O. 30/57/69 WO/4.

49. Smith's biographer, H.A. Taylor considered that this verdict on Smith's period at the Bureau 'would not be confirmed by responsible people in Fleet Street'. H.A. Taylor, Smith of Birkenhead(London,Stanley Paul & Co 1928), p.7. I have seen no evidence to support this assertion and neither did Taylor produce any in 1928.

familiar British story of ad hoc improvision. No detailed plans had been drawn up for its existence and no clear definition of its functions and responsibilities was given to the press, the public or its own staff. Its first Director was temperamentally unsuited to the task imposed upon him, his staff were untrained nor were they fully under his control. Unlike in France, or Germany, the British press was not totally controlled by government; British press censorship was voluntary in principle, substantially increasing the chances of confusion and recrimination in its operation. A censorship which is in total control of all published information is far easier to administer than a system dependent on voluntary initiative and tolerance particularly in a sphere of activity notoriously competitive and suspicious. The cry of 'unfair' was almost inevitable.

Press censorship was little more at first than a continuation of the pre-war voluntary arrangements and the government had no direct control at any time during the war over the press. Ironically the three government ministers who between them enunciated this principle, Churchill, Haldane and Asquith were the three ministers most subject to vicious and devastating press attacks during the war and who may well have regretted at times their stalwart defence of such liberal ideals. From the outset the Bureau made no attempt to stifle criticism of government, the conduct of the war or the Bureau itself which along with its Director came in for more than its fair share of press attacks in the first months of its operations. The Bureau had been created primarily to replace the Joint Committee in providing official 'advice' and more news and this latter function it failed to do in the early months of the war, mainly through no fault of its own. It had also been established to eradicate the wild rumours. These were less in evidence by the end of September but this was due more to press restraint and a calmer public atmosphere than any action by the Bureau. Press cablegrams and copy were delayed or stopped but there was no noticeable change in the look or content of British newspapers after the arrival of the Bureau - there were no blank spaces as in French papers where the censors showed their hand.

Like all government agencies, the Press Bureau soon sought to wrest more independence from its principal sponsors, the Admiralty and the War Office. Its first major attempt, by approving, altering and then disowning the Amiens dispatch, not only acted as a temporary curb to its expansionary aims but retarded what little public rapport it had created with its principal client, the press. Under more forceful and competent directors, the Bureau was to continue to seek more power while at the same time some government departments and the press questioned the need for its existence at all. Yet all the time the Bureau faced the brickbats from both sides with consumate loyalty and forbearance. For by its presence, departmental responsibility for errors could be evaded and press self-censorship concealed in welters of self-righteous indignation at alleged curtailments of 'liberty' or 'information'. Perhaps in this respect it is fitting to close this chapter by giving the last word to F.E. Smith who after all has been the principal actor in the drama so far. Answering a complaint by Blumenfeld, editor of the Daily Express he wearily observed : 'We are good enough for the kicks but are to have no half pennies'.[50]

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50. Smith to Blumenfeld, 29th August 1914, Blumenfeld Papers, House of Lords Record Office.

CHAPTER III

The Press Bureau

'When the war is over no one will be the least interested in the Press Bureau, what it did, what it was unable to do or the curious conditions under which it worked'. The English Review, March 1916.

When F.E. Smith was first given the job as Director of the Press Bureau he had no office, no staff and no clear idea of what had to be done apart from a vague notion to keep any news likely to be of value to the enemy out of the newspapers. When Smith left in September 1914 things were not much better as we have seen in Chapter II. It is a tribute to the efficiency of his successor, Sir Stanley Buckmaster, that by late October 1914 all those responsible for censoring cables and newspapers were housed in one building under one central authority, that the four main departments within the Bureau were established and a system of instructions had been established for the guidance both of censors and editors as to how the censorship was to be conducted.

The early days of the Bureau's existence in an Admiralty building - 40 Charing Cross Road - have been described by Sir Edward Cook, Joint Director with Sir Frank Swettenham of the Bureau from May 1915, as a 'hopeless arrangement (in) very inadequate premises'.[1] We have discussed the problems and chaos of those first days in Chapter II - how the press looked in vain to the Bureau for full and up-to-date news of the progress of the war, how the censorship of press cables was undertaken at the Central Telegraph office (C.T.O.) under direct War Office supervision and how decisions on press material voluntarily submitted, were often delayed for long periods because of referral to Service Departments indifferent to press deadlines. Most of these complaints remained a source of irritation for the press throughout the war but Buckmaster did effect a major improvement in the operation of the cable censorship shortly after taking over from Smith.

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1. Cook, op. cit., (1920) pp. 32-33.

The arrangement whereby the censorship of an enormous volume of international press cables done at the C.T.O. by untrained Service personnel subject to the guidance of a committee which met at the Press Bureau was recognized by Buckmaster and the press organizations to be a totally inadequate one. From the moment of his appointment as Director, Buckmaster strove to achieve as much independent responsibility for the Bureau as possible, which was understandable in the case of the cable censorship in that it was Buckmaster's unenviable task to answer the frequent criticisms levelled against it in the House of Commons. He was a politically ambitious man and had no desire to be associated with the failings of those who were held to be his responsibility but were not under his direct control.

He began discussions with Sir Reginald Brade Permanent Secretary at the War Office, and Colonel Churchill, the Chief Censor at the War Office, to get the cable censors moved to the Bureau's new home at the Royal United Services Institution in Whitehall and under his direct supervision. They agreed in principle but, reluctant to relinquish direct control over Service personnel, did nothing about it. Matters quickly came to a head when on the 8th of October 1914, the cable censors at the C.T.O. passed a Reuter's telegram about reinforcements being sent to the relief of Amsterdam (then under siege by the Germans), reference to which in the newspapers had already been prohibited by a Notice issued by the Press Bureau on War Office instructions. Buckmaster immediately complained to McKenna, the Home Secretary, 'about the urgency of getting the Cable Censors moved here... to make their actions co-ordinate with ours..the attempt to prevent the publication of the news (of the reinforcements) has broken down... (and)...this office is once more made ridiculous'.[2]

When Buckmaster took up the issue with Brade, he was met with a new argument, that the War Office, despite the problems, was'doubtful of the wisdom of bringing the C.T.O. to the Press Bureau in view of the annoyance and expense this would mean to the press'[3] In the light

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2. Buckmaster to McKenna, 8th October 1914 P.R.O. HO 139/13/A488/I.
3. Brade to Buckmaster, 9th October 1914, ibid.

of these delaying tactics Buckmaster went into action. Armed with a N.P.A. resolution of the 15th of October 1914 expressing total approval for the move of the cable censors to the Bureau, Buckmaster, with McKenna's assistance, obtained Cabinet approval for a resolution which stated that 'the Press Cable Censors whether working at the Central Telegraph Office or elsewhere are a branch of the Press Bureau (and) that the Director of the Press Bureau is responsible for the work of all the Press Censors'.[4] Faced with such neat political footwork, the War Office agreed to the transfer of the cable censors to the Press Bureau which duly occured on the 25th of October 1914.

Following the transfer of the C.T.O censors, Buckmaster created four departments to carry out the work - an Issuing Department responsible for the release of all official information, a Cable Department for the censoring of all press cablegrams, a Press Department for the censorship of all material voluntarily submitted (articles, photographs, maps and later books and leaflets) and a Naval Department responsible for all Admiralty censorship and related subjects.[5] It is an indication of the fierce independence insisted upon by the Admiralty that Buckmaster was obliged to create a separate Naval Department which behaved as we shall see later in this chapter in many ways as a self-governing enclave within the Bureau. The Admiralty also (and not the Bureau) had responsibility for the censorship of German wireless broadcasts which were picked up by Marconi and sent on by the Admiralty to the Bureau for press release as 'British Admiralty Intercepts' or later as 'Admiralty per Wireless Press'.[6] Buckmaster and his successors as Directors of the Bureau faced two major problems in conducting the censorship - an inexperienced and mainly semi-retired staff and an ill-defined relationship with the major departments of state, who tended to treat this 'strange and amorphous office'[7] - the Press Bureau - constantly demanding decisions and information, with a mixture of contempt and suspicion. In this chapter we shall examine these two major factors, staff and liaison problems before examining the range of news items which were subject to censorship.

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4. 19th October 1914. P.R.O. HO 139/II/A411/1.
5. 'Notice to all Officers of the Press Bureau',26th October 1914, P.R.O. HO 139/17/1202.
6. ibid.
7. Buckmaster to Major-General Callwell, 2nd December 1914 P.R.O. HO 139/6/A169/12.

Firstly then the staff. There are few occupations which earn such universal detestation as that of being a censor, be it of the press, film or theatre. Milton considered that 'there cannot be a more tedious and unpleasing journey work', the only people likely to take it being 'either (the) ignorant, impervious or basely impecunious'.[8] Brendan Bracken, Churchill's Minister of Information during the Second World War compared censors to 'mules, they have no pride of ancestry and no hope of posterity'.[9] The Press Bureau censors were not fools, rogues or paupers but as Lord Courtney of Penwith observed in 1917 : 'Censorship is an office which makes a man a fool when he is not born into it'.[10] With more than a touch of the malicious, The Times on 28th September 1915, commenting on the Press Bureau staff, remarked that 'with the exception of two or three of the highest rank, no one knows who they are, whence they came, how they were chosen or what their number may be'.[11]

The censorship staff were mainly retired or disabled Service personnel with a smattering of lawyers, civil servants and academics - selected quickly by the Chief Censors at the War Office and the Admiralty in the frenetic days immediately prior to and just after the outbreak of the war. Class, rank and family background had quite a lot to do with the selection - the list of naval censors in 1915 reads like a page out of Debrett's Peerage. Captain the Honourable Sir Seymour Fortescue, K.C.V.O., C.M.G., commanded two baronet captains, two commanders, two lieutenant commanders and one Hon. Lieutenant.

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8. John Milton, Areopagitica and Of Education, edited by K.M. Lea (London, Oxford University Press, 1970) p. 35.
9. Andrew Boyle. Poor Dear Brendan (London, Hutchinson & Co., 1974) p.308.
10. The Nation, 2nd August 1917. This view of press censors was echoed across the Atlantic. According to two American academics writing in 1939, George Creel, the chief of the Censorship Bureau during the First World War was 'one of the most disliked and traduced members of the national Government' J. Mock & C. Larsen, Words that Won the War, (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1942), p.12.
11. Sir John Simon the Home Secretary answered this charge a month later by giving the House of Commons a detailed breakdown of the Press Bureau administration and its costs. The Bureau by this time employed a staff of 122 - 2 Directors, 2 Assistant Directors, a Secretary and 40 censors (25 appointed by the War Office and 8 by the Admiralty) at a total cost up until 30th September 1915.of £4,547. House of Commons Debates 5th Series, 26th October 1915, Cols. 34-35.

When Buckmaster sought two replacement censors for the Military Room in November 1914 he recommended for one of the posts a Colonel Parker on the grounds that 'he is a cousin of Lord Parker and if he has any part of the family intelligence he ought to be very useful'.[12] The military censors appear mainly to have been selected on an ad hoc basis, some from the retired list, most with the rank of colonel. Of the twenty-five military censors, seventeen were of active service age but as Sir John Simon the Home Secretary told the House of Commons on on the 26th of October 1915 'some are not fit for military service'[13] prompting Mr Lynch, M.P. for West Clare to ask 'whether those who are of military service would not be better employed at the front than in hoodwinking the British public'.[14] Between the glittering ranks of these Service personnel and the resident press corps at the Bureau representing their papers or agencies, were seven journalist sub-editors recruited in 1915 as an attempt to silence the kind of snip ing already quoted above. These existed at the Bureau in a state of limbo neither trusted or respected by either side.

The Bureau had two lawyers as Directors, F.E. Smith and Sir Stanley Buckmaster - both selected for party reasons - Smith, a leading Unionist, as a gesture to Party unanimity in war-time and Buckmaster a distinguished Liberal Solicitor General to counter what was believed by some Liberals, notably Lloyd George, to be the Unionist bias of the censors.[15] When Buckmaster became Lord Chancellor in May 1915 he was succeeded by a joint directorate of Sir Edward Cook and Sir Frank Swettenham which lasted for the remainder of the war. Cook, a Liberal Imperialist and former editor of the Pall Mall Gazette and

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12. Buckmaster to Colonel Cockerill, War Office, 30th November 1914. P.R.O. HO 139/8/A314/Part3/107.

13. House of Commons Debates, 5th Series, 26th October 1915, Cols. 34-5.

14. ibid. 'The right man was never in the right place' wrote Dr. K. Mühsam about the selection of unsuitable staff as censors in Germany during the war. K. Mühsam, Wie Wir Belogenwurden, p.15 cited by Salmon, The Newspaper and Authority op. cit., (1923) p. 128.

15. Smith denied this most strenuously in a letter to Lloyd George on the 9th of September 1914 in which he referred to having heard from Churchill that Lloyd George felt the Press Bureau staff to be 'unduly Tory'. Lloyd George Papers, C/3/7/5, House of Lords Record Office.

and the Daily News had previously worked with the Neutral Press Committee and had close experience of the work of the Bureau. Swettenham, a retired Colonial civil servant, had previously worked as assistant to Smith and Buckmaster. It was not an easy social mix over which they ruled and there were frequent storms within the Bureau apart from the constant battering it received from outside, although personally Cook and Swettenham appeared to have worked well together. Cook tended to have more direct contact with the press and Swettenham seems to have relished the frequent skirmishes the Bureau had in the battlefields of Whitehall.

Retired colonels and baronet captains tend to mix with journalists like oil and water and there were frequent clashes between the Service personnel and the resident journalists. This was made worse by the elitism of the naval censors who formed themselves into a separate mess, H.M.S. President, reflecting their administrative relationship with the Bureau which was to work under the direct orders of the Chief Censor at the Admiralty, Rear-Admiral Brownrigg, with little reference to the Directors of the Bureau. A bitter row developed in 1916 for example between the naval censors and the resident journalists, one of whom had accused a naval censor, Commander Davies, of being persistently intoxicated while on duty. When the journalist in question, a Mr. Watson, was banned from working at the Bureau, the N.U.J. objected most strongly and the atmosphere within the Bureau, became so strained that Sir Graham Greene, Permanent Secretary at the Admiralty wrote to Swettenham and Cook demanding 'protection' for the naval censors against the 'threatening behaviour of the journalists'.[16]

Given the volume of work it is perhaps not surprising that tempers frayed or that inconsistent and occasionaly foolish decisions were made. In 1916, the only year for which such comprehensive figures are available, the Bureau censored 343,668 cablegrams and telegrams, the military censors dealt with 38,436 proofs voluntarily submitted and the naval censors, 12,871. The number of photographs dealt with by

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16. Sir Graham Greene to the Press Bureau, 30th January 1916. P.R.O. HO 139/32/A1258.

the military and naval censors was 25,064 and for transmission abroad 112,458. During one week (23rd - 30th September 1915) taken 'at hazard' the Bureau received 388 letters and sent out 1,565 and for the whole year 4,121 communiques (excluding casualty lists) were issued to the press[17] - not an unreasonable achievement with a total staff of 122.[18]

Censorship work is a matter of judgement, of holding in the mind of any number of instructions, notices already sent out and statutory regulations and then making an instant decision consistent with previous decisions either to pass,stop or refer. The difficulties have been well described by Churchill in a minute to Neville Chamberlain at the commencement of the Second World War : ' Censorship and release are easy to people at the top of the Service Departments because they have the whole state of business in their minds and know or can readily ascertain, what will do harm...Far more difficult is it to embody this discretionary power into rules which can be worked by subordinates, possessing only a limited view and bound to adhere to the letter of their instructions'[19] The Press Bureau censors were obviously lacking that superior view of 'the whole state of business' although this disadvantage was to some extent overcome with experience but they laboured under the additional handicap of knowing that the slightest error might be picked up and made the subject of criticism or mockery in the press or Parliament with government ministers on occasions joining in the sport.

For example, there were frequent instructions to the censors and D Notices issued to the press prohibiting all mention of the movements of the King and members of the Royal family. Reading the line 'and the kings depart' from the Robert Browning poem, an overzealous censor cut it from an article submitted by The Times in October 1915 which immediately led to a public furore. Mr. Outhwaite, M.P. for Hanley

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17. P.R.O. HO 139/36.

18. Statement to the House of Commons by Sir John Simon, 26th October 1915, House of Commons Debates, 5 Series, Cols. 34-5.

19. Churchill to Neville Chamberlain, 22nd December 1939, P.R.O. Cab/Prem/1/439.

asked Sir John Simon if 'the country (was) still paying for the services of this idiot'[20] and a few days later Mr. Robert Macneil, M.P. for the St. Augustine Division of Kent asked Simon if he would be instructing the Press Bureau to issue a list of British poets whose work might be safely quoted in the press. Simon, joining in the fun, gave the answer that the incident had caused all censors'to strictly meditate the thankless muse'.[21] When the War Office, in June 1915, insisted that all Service personnel should submit written work for publication (including sketches and drawings) for censorship, Mr. Ashley, M.P. for the Blackpool division of North Lancashire asked Mr. Tennant, Under-Secretary of State at the War Office, if he could 'guarantee any sense of humour in the Press Bureau' to which Tennant replied : 'I should be very sorry to go so far as that'.[22]

Tennant's own department had in this case issued the instructions for which the Press Bureau censors were being held responsible, a vivid illustration of the second major factor affecting the work of the Bureau, its reliance on the government departments for instructions and up-to-date information for release to the press. It was galling for the staff of the Bureau that so few members of even the 'informed' public appeared to be aware of how completely dependent the Bureau was for its efficiency on a close and cordial working relationship with the Service and other departments, a relationship which never fully blossomed during the war. As a former Secretary of the C.I.D., Lord Sydenham (Sir George Clarke) wrote in the Evening News on the 22nd of October 1915; it was a situation in which '...all the officers of a ship engaged in shouting different orders to the engine room'.

Both Service departments had quickly established sections to deal with press censorship issues, M.O.7 (a) at the War Office and a section under Sir Douglas Brownrigg at the Admiralty. Although liaison between the War Office and the Bureau was poor at first, it did improve as the war progressed but that with the Admiralty, antagonistic at the

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20. House of Commons Debates, 5th Series, 14th October 1915, Col. 1463.
21. House of Commons Debates, 5th Series, 21st October 1915, Col. 1987.
22. House of Commons Debates, 5th Series 22nd June 1915, Col. 831.

start, never got much better. Like most inter-departmental disputes, the acrimony was over responsibility and authority, or put more crudely, who was to get the blame when things went wrong. When a censor at the Bureau was doubtful about an item, he referred it to his section head who, if also in doubt, submitted it to one of the Directors (one of whom was always on duty) for reference, if necessary to one of the Service or other departments. The item would then be sent over to the department concerned where it might be passed, stopped or referred to a senior officer or Minister for decision. All this could take a matter of hours during the day but as a Press Bureau submission to the War Cabinet commented in 1917 : 'Very great inconvenience and often quite unreasonable delay, is caused by the necessity of reference to Government Departments, especially the War Office, Foreign Office, the Ministry of Munitions and the Treasury, at times (say between 8 p.m. and midnight) when there is no responsible person available to answer the enquiries. These delays are naturally very irritating to the Press and it is remarkable that they have not made more insistent complaints in regard to the holding-up of cablegrams and other press matters not only for hours but sometimes for days'.[23]

For their part, War Office officials such as Major General Callwell, Director of Military Operations wondered why so many items were sent to them 'as there often appears to be no question about them' and many were so often 'a matter of opinion. A message was sent over late last night (26th November 1914) with regard to the raids towards the Suez Canal and was considered by my orderly officer. I find that he cut out something in connection with the capture of coastguards which I should certainly have passed'[24] to which Buckmaster somewhat acidily replied : 'Our people are not well informed as to what is going on from any Department of State ...a barbed wire entanglement is an easier thing to manage than the rules by which this office is controlled'.[25]

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23. 'The Offical Press Bureau', 6th March 1917 P.R.O. Cab 21/93.
24. Callwell to Buckmaster, 27th November 1914, P.R.O. HO 139/19/A724/ Part 1/4.
25. Buckmaster to Callwell, 28th November 1914. ibid.

Instructions were sometimes given to the Bureau by the Services which the Bureau had great difficulty in administering. Because of the ban on war correspondents at the commencement of hostilities, unofficial reports flourished and on the 24th of September 1914 the War Office issued D 48 through the Bureau which sought to prevent the publication of all unofficial reports of military operations within twenty miles of the front. But as Swettenham complained to the War Office in October, 'This instruction is being broken every day with the result that (a) the censors are at sea and (b) the Bureau is liable to a charge of winking at a breach of its own orders...'[26] When accredited correspondents were allowed at the front (five at G.H.Q. from May 1915) their copy was censored by military field censorship along lines well established during the South African War (not that their copy needed much censorship from the military field censors as we shall discuss in Chapter VI). But in addition to these precautions the War Office insisted that the despatches be re-censored by the military censors at the Bureau before release on the grounds that the situation could have changed drastically by the time the despatch had reached London, an explanation which never convinced the correspondents and editors who regarded it as an unnecessary piece of bureacracy for which 'the censorship' was blamed.

Instructions were sometimes given to the Bureau only to be ignored in particular cases by the issuing department. As a Press Bureau official complained in December 1914 : 'The Admiralty in several cases and the Foreign Office in one case at least have shown a tendency towards sanctioning the publication of news which conflicts with a general rule already issued on their authority'.[27] Worse still from a press view point were cases where Admiralty news for example was published for a number of hours and then as Buckmaster complained to Graham Greene on 1st of February 1915, 'a change of direction from the Admiralty' [28] led to the matter being stopped. Only two days after

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26. Swettenham to the War Office, 9th October 1914 P.R.O. HO 139/9/A337.
27. Memorandum from R.P. Hills to Sir Frank Swettenham, 14th December 1914, P.R.O. HO 139/19/A724/Part I/5.
28. Buckmaster to Greene, P.R.O. HO 139/11/A411/Part 1.

Buckmaster's letter Brownrigg ordered the censors at the Bureau to stop a Reuter's telegram containing details of an interview given by Churchill, then First Lord of the Admiralty, to the French paper Le Matin . (Churchill had boasted about how Britain had kept its promise to defend the Channel and the North Sea which the Admiralty Lords feared might not go down so well in places like Scarborough and Bridlington, the victims of recent German bombardments from sea). A number of British papers had already published details of this interview on 3rd February and Reuters were less than pleased at the explanation given to them by the Bureau that 'there is no cause of complaint against the Press Bureau'.[29] As Reuters argued in their reply on 6th February 'officially we can only come to the Press Bureau with representations and complaints and the reply is to transfer the responsibility to a Department of Government which in turn shelters behind the Press Bureau'.[30]

Liaison with the Admiralty caused the greatest problems for the Bureau in its administration of the press censorship and in its relationship with the press. Although military censorship policy was made by section M.1.7(a) under the Director of Military Intelligence at the War Office, the Directors of the Bureau were able to excercise executive control over the military censors at the Bureau. This was not the case with the naval censors who referred even minor details to Brownrigg for decision and whose working arrangments and staff schedules were controlled from the Admiralty. This proved a major bone of contention throughout the war, particularly as in the opinion of Buckmaster (and later of Swettenham and Cook), the naval censors 'do not appear to be able to deal effectively with their work'[31] - for which the Press Bureau was often blamed - and about which the Admiralty remained indifferent. As Buckmaster told Sir Graham Greene on the 10th of November 1914 he could see 'no reasons in the national interest for delaying information (about the sinking of the German

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29. Reuters to Press Bureau, 4th February 1915, P.R.O. HO 139/14/572/27.
30. Reuters to the Press Bureau, 6th February 1915, ibid.
31. Buckmaster to Greene, 27th November 1914 P.R.O. HO 139/11/A411/Part 1.

Battleship 'Emden').....it is the Press Bureau which has to bear the burden of all the abuse that is levelled at us by an exasperated Press and Public'.[33]

The relationship between the Bureau and the Admiralty - described by Brownrigg in his memoirs as one of 'pull devil pull baker between them and me'[34] - had reached such a level of non-communication by 1917 that an error made by one of the naval censors at the Bureau which had become a matter of correspondence between the Admiralty and the War Cabinet, was only discovered by the Bureau through a newspaper report. The Directors of the Bureau, Swettenham complained to the Admiralty, 'were ignored by all concerned'.[35] It is thus not surprising to discover in the Press Bureau's submission on how the press censorship should be conducted in any future conflict that 'the position of the naval censors should be regularized to the extent that, while appointed to the Admiralty, they should like the military and civilian censors, be under the control of the Director of the Bureau who should decide how many censors are required, the system on which they work, their records kept and their leave arranged'.[36]

Not that all the acrimony and disputes were solely between the Bureau and the Services. Confusion at the Bureau over instructions from the Foreign Office often led to delays while items were referred. A delay over news of the resignation of the Greek Prime Minister Venizelos in 1915 caused such a press and Parliamentary row that Robert Cecil, Under-Secretary of State at the Foreign Office persuaded the Government in December 1915 to abandon the official censorship of foreign news. It was a decision not approved of at the Press Bureau. In the Bureau's submission to the War Cabinet already cited, Cook and Swettenham argued that Cecil's move 'has proved a failure and whilst the Press are told that Foreign Affairs are not censored but left to the discretion of Editors, messages whole or in part, are

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33. Buckmaster to Greene, 27th November 1914. P.R.O. HO 139/11/A411/ Part 1/1.
34. Brownrigg, op. cit., (1920), pp. 6-7.
35. Swettenham to Greene, 26th May 1917, P.R.O. HO 139/11 , op. cit.
36. 'The Official Press Bureau', 6th March 1917, P.R.O. Cab 21/93.

often referred to the Foreign Office'[37] In other words the Bureau continued to unofficially censor foreign affairs items throughout the war, despite a N.P.A. resolution of 30th October 1917 calling on the Bureau to adhere to the spirit of Robert Cecil's 1915 decision.[38]

As for the supply of official bulletins to the press, the Bureau was again utterly dependent upon the departments but as the war progressed and the authorities slowly recognized the crucial role being played by the press in sustaining home morale and recruitment, the division between news and propaganda became increasingly blurred. Although the Department...(later Ministry) of Information and sections of the War Office such as M.I.7. were created primarily for propagandist purposes, it was inevitable that they strayed into what the Bureau regarded as its special prerogative, the supply of all official news and photographs to the press. There was no love lost between the officials of the Press Bureau and Department of Information. John Buchan, the Department's first director had said the press censorship 'bristles with sins of omission and commission' ('how can censorship "bristle with sins"?' asked Swettenham)[39] and the Bureau took great delight in ocassionally censoring items issued for release by Buchan's department.[40]

In June 1918 the Bureau stopped a Ministry of Information telegram giving details of the Pemberton Billing trial on the grounds that allegations by Billing that the Germans had in their possession a black book containing details of the sexual peversions of prominent British politicians was '...hardly likely to help our cause in neutral countries'.[41]

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37. 'The Official Press Bureau' op. cit.

38. P.R.O. HO 139/10/1.

39. Swettenham to Hankey, 28th February,1917,P.R.O. HO 139/9/A368/ Part 2/24.

40. Buchan believed, erroneously, that the Bureau had been responsible for the suppression of one of his despatches from the Western Front in 1915.

41. Swettenham to Hankey, 5th June 1918,P.R.O. HO 139/16/A672/Part 8/146.

A bitter row developed in September 1918 over the Press Bureau's insistence that all photographs from the Western Front, including those destined for the Ministry of Information, be censored at the Bureau before issue. The Ministry appealed to the Prime Minister who ruled that henceforth all photographs after censorship at G.H.Q. should be sent direct to the Ministry of Information and not the Bureau and 'that the Press Bureau should accept the instructions of the Minister of Information on the same basis as it accepts the instructions of other Ministers'.[42] While inevitably obliged to obey this ruling Swettenham remained adamant that the Bureau did not receive instructions from other departments : 'We understand that word as equivalent to orders and as intermediaries between the Departments and the Press, we see all the difference in the world between instructions and requests'.[43] But Cook and Swettenham, in a post war submission to the War Cabinet in 1919 recognized the anomaly of two government departments issuing official information to the press. They recommended that in any future war''...Censorship and Propaganda...(be) placed under the direct control and personal supervision of a Minister appointed for the purpose...'[44]

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42. W.H. Davies, Private Secretary to Lloyd George, to Sir George Cave, Home Secretary, 11th September 1918, P.R.O. HO 139/16/A672/Part 1/9.

43. Swettenham to Home Office, 27th September 1918 ibid.

The Bureau continued to censor or as Sir Henry Newbolt put it 'mangle' the Ministry of Information's telegraphic messages until the end of the war, Newbolt to Press Bureau, 13th November 1918, ibid.

44. Press Bureau Memorandum to Cabinet, 27th February 1919, P.R.O. HO 139/17/A682/Part 2/11.

When the C.T.O. military censors transferred to the Bureau in November 1914 they brought with them instructions defining their duties which Buckmaster quickly incorporated into a private notice to all staff at the Bureau outlining what he understood to be the role of the Bureau and defining in broad terms their job as censors. Buckmaster told the staff that the main duties of the Press Bureau were to issue official war news and 'the censorship of the Press, that is to say, the determination of what unofficial news may or may not be published and the passing or stopping of Press cablegrams' The main object of the censorship, Buckmaster stated, was ' (i) To prevent the publication of news injurious to the Naval and Military operations of the British Empire or of its Allies (ii) To prevent the publication of news likely to cause needless alarm or distress among the civil population and (iii) To prevent the publication of news objectionable on political grounds e.g. news calculated to injure the susceptibilities of the Allied countries', along principles '...at present laid down in existing (D.O.R.A.) regulations and in various 'D' Notices already issued'.[45] The D Notice in other words was to serve two purposes - as an operating guide for the censors as well as a means of instructing and influencing newspaper editors.

In the light of Buckmaster's three objectives what sort of items were censored also bearing in mind the Bureau's staff and liaison problems? As for the first objective, as a general rule nothing was to be passed which revealed the movements, numbers or operations of ships, troops or aircraft. The military were particularly concerned to stop any mention or indication in the press of the battle order. D.15 (28th August 1914) forbade the listing of the names of commanders of brigades or divisions unless previously reported in official statements, D 48 (24th September 1914) prohibited 'speculation as to probable or impending movements of the Allied Forces in France, Belgium or the Dardanelles' and D 110 (5th December 1914) prohibited information being published '...of the movements of any units or divisions until fourteen days have elapsed since the movement was completed'.[46] By 1915 a substantial

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45. 'Notice to all Officers of the Press Bureau', 26th October 1914, P.R.O. HO 139/17/1202.

46. P.R.O. HO 139/43.

number of instructions had been issued to censors but as we have observed earlier, censorship is so often a matter of judgement on the part of the individual censor who was presumably not assisted in his[47] task by instructions (referring to the rule that no report was to be passed from Northern France which was less than five days old unless officially confirmed) which laid down that '...any matter which is dangerous should be excised whether it refers to the last five days or not and speculations of what the Allies are going to do should be stopped. Otherwise if harmless such messages and articles may be passed'.[48]

When the problem of shell shortages became apparent to the military authorities, censors were told to stop all such references. Although Marlowe, editor of the Daily Mail was able to provide Lloyd George with a bundle of articles in which details of the shortages had been excised,[49] given the chance that such an item could slip past or be considered 'harmless' by an individual censor, it is not surprising that this instruction did not prevent the news of the shortages leaking to the press well before Repington's calculated revelation in The Times in May 1915. Soldiers letters on this subject, some of which had been published, led to an instruction to the censors that all soldiers'letters to the press were to be stopped, causing a howl of protest in the Press.

What upset editors, particularly those in rural areas, was that these letters continued to be published in parish magazines, often revealing information prohibited or delayed by the Press Bureau. In September 1915, the Rev. Oken Parrish of Longfleet near Poole told his parishioners about the sinking of ships in the English channel (not previously published), of methods of capturing German submarines by 'wire mesh made by Mr. Craddock' and he referred to Zeppelin raids at Goole and

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47. Censorship, with its long hours and night work was considered at the time to be unsuitable for female staff.

48. Instructions to censors, January 1915. P.R.O. HO 139/27/A1036/ Part 1/46.

49. Marlowe, editor of the Daily Mail to Lloyd George, 24th May 1915, D/18/1/1. Lloyd George Papers, House of Lords Record Office.

other places all of which had been prohibited by Press Bureau D Notices.[50] The Sandringham Parish Magazine for September 1915 published a secret and hitherto unpublished despatch from General Inglefield, Commander of the East Anglian Division at the Dardanelles (in which Inglefield painted a very gloomy picture of the prospects for success) and a detailed account of the losses suffered by the 5th Norfolk Regiment at Anafarta. The Bureau took up such complaints from other editors very seriously and requested bishops to remind all vicars that they like the rest of the community, were subject to the D.O.R.A. Regulations.[51] The rule applied by the military authorities was that anything for publication emanating from France or other theatres of war was to be censored by field censorship and again by the Press Bureau military censors in London and this applied to all writers however distinguished. Anything which revealed tactical information likely to be of use to the enemy was cut. A despatch about Loos written by the novelist John Buchan, then a free-lance journalist engaged by The Times was suppressed on these grounds (not as Buchan and The Times alleged because Buchan had praised the bravery of the German soldiers).[52]

All maps and sketches illustrating naval or military operations had to be submitted for censorship including all photographs which were censored both at G.H.Q. and again at the Bureau, one purpose of which was to ensure the complete elimination of 'the ones that show our dead'.[53] Care was taken over captions which were not to be altered. When the Daily Mirror in October 1915 re-wrote the caption of a photograph of soldiers disembarking at Salonika, replacing 'Greek' soldiers with 'British', the Bureau sent the case to the D.P.P. on the grounds that such a statement was 'spreading a false statement

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50. P.R.O. HO 139/22/A894/4. When Swettenham referred this case to the Admiralty as a breach of regulations, he was promptly told by Brownrigg in mocking tone that 'The view taken here is that the Parish Parson is not worth prosecuting..incidently I am asked unofficially since when have you become interested in Parish magazines?' Brownrigg to Swettenham 6th September 1915, ibid.

51. Press Bureau circular, 13th September 1915, ibid.

52. P.R.O. HO 139/29/A1123/Patt 1/1.

53. Colonel Warbuton Davies, Chief Censor G.H.Q. to Press Bureau, 4th October 1915, ibid.

likely to prejudice His Majesty's relations with a Foreign Power'.[54] The case was dropped but the Mirror was warned that a repeat performance would result in its being denied any official photographs which for a paper packed daily with photographs and illustrations was a serious threat to its competitiveness. G.H.Q. sent a note to the D.M.I. at the War Office in 1917 requesting that all captions for photographs showing Chinese and other native labourers should read 'Native' and not 'Black' labourers as this could adversely affect recruiting in China.[55] (When an unsavoury row developed between the news agencies in 1916 as to which agency was to distribute official photographs, Sir Frank Swettenham told Riddell of the N.P.A. : '...there is no branch of the censorship which is more difficult and at the same time more important than that of photographs').[56]

Very often, because the censorship was voluntary a particular article or leader was published which upset the military and led to a fresh instruction for censors and editors to absorb. A leader in The Times on the 21st of January 1915 speculating on the likely time of arrival of Kitchener's armies in France, described by Brade as 'stupidity beyond belief'[57] brought forth D 137 the following day reminding the press that the German High Command read the British papers and that such articles assisted the enemy 'in their plans and dispositions against both our forces and those of the Allies'.[58] An article in The Times in July 1915 by a former staff reporter serving with the 13th Kensington Battalion of the London Regiment, had suggested that the writer's battalion was the only one which had done its job at the ferocious battle of Festubert in May 1915. The article upset Field Marshal French

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54. Press Bureau to D.P.P., 17th November 1915, P.R.O. 139/13/A503/5.
55. P.R.O. HO 139/27/A1036/Part 4/262.
56. Swettenham to Riddell, 17th April 1917, P.R.O. HO 139/10/27.
57. P.R.O. HO 139/43.
58. P.R.O. HO 139/19.

who sent a brisk note to Kitchener demanding that '.... greater circumspection be exercised by those responsible for the transmission of matter relating to operations in the Daily Press. The (article) has not only given great offence to units who took part...but in addition has had the effect of making the unit unpopular with the battalion with which it has been honourably associated'.[59] French's letter led to a notice to the press that 'articles other than those of authorised correspondents purporting to describe operations at the front as a result of personal observation are prohibited'.[60]

But nowhere was Buckmaster's first principle of the censorship that it should prevent news which might hamper naval or military operations pursued to such extremes as in the press censorship undertaken on Admiralty orders, described by Sir George Riddell in his diary as 'a law unto itself'.[61] No news of any success or mishap to naval vessels was to be passed until officially announced and particular emphasis was placed by the Admiralty in stopping reports of operations against enemy submarines or damage caused by them - even speculation 'as to how to deal with enemy submarines should be avoided' (D 150,3rd February 1915).[62] When the Western Daily News submitted a report in July 1915 taken from the Buenos Ayres Standard of an engagement between a British merchant ship (which had a Devonshire man on board) and a German submarine, a large part of it was censored on Admiralty orders on the grounds that 'it is undesirable to publish the chasing of steamers by German submarines'.[63] Such a decision 'will not wash'[64] considered the editor of the Western Daily Press reflecting a more general press view that Admiralty censorship decisions were taken more to cover up Admiralty errors than to prevent news reaching the enemy.

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59. French to Kitchener, 9th August 1915, P.R.O. WO 32/4893.
60. D 46, 23rd September 1915, P.R.O. HO 139/19.
61. Riddell op. cit., (1933) p.26.
62. P.R.O. HO 139/19.
63. Swettenham to N.P.A., 14th July 1915, P.R.O. NO 139/10/8.
64. Letter to Press Bureau, 21st July 1915, ibid.

The Press Bureau, on Admiralty orders issued fourteen D Notices for the guidance of censors and editors about the reporting of shipping losses and damage to ships caused by the German U Boats - D 168 (25th February 1915) being the first and typical of the genre : 'The Press has probably realised the danger of publishing the loss of British merchant ships as a result of the enemy's activity in the use of submarines and the sowing of mines...These reports encourage the enemy to further efforts while they are calculated to create in the minds of shipowners...a growing hesitation to risk their vessels (and) seamen will almost certainly demand greatly increased rates of pay'.[65] At the height of the U Boat campaign in 1917 a more drastic control was imposed, the only losses to be reported being the weekly statement issued by the Admiralty (D 548, 28th February 1917).[66] which excluded all losses of Allied and neutral ships and provided only the number of ships lost in the previous week, not the tonnage.

In his memoirs, Brownrigg suggests that he used the censorship against certain 'naval critics to prevent them driving a wedge 'between any two schools of thought in the navy or letting it be thought outside that such a cleavage was possibly in existence'.[67] Thus the naval censors were instructed to stop all stories of Admiralty staff changes unless officially announced and at the time of Jutland to stop any suggestion being published of 'internal Admiralty dissension'.[68] Admiral Sir John Jellicoe, Commander-in-Chief of the Grand Fleet and later First Sea Lord was the prime mover in this closing of the ranks and it was Jellicoe who was principally responsible for the suppression of the prestigious and privately circulated Naval Review in 1915. Jellicoe argued that articles containing detailed criticism of Admiralty tactics, such as one on the loss of Admiral Craddock's squadron in the South Atlantic in November 1914 (which had appeared in the May 1915 edition of the Review) were very harmful to naval discipline (and in

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65. P.R.O. HO 139/43.
66. ibid.
67. Brownrigg, op. cit., (1920) p.32.
68. Admiralty to Press Bureau, 6th July 1916, P.R.O. HO 139/39.

effect reflected badly on senior commanders). Rear Admiral W.H. Henderson, editor of the Review was told that it had been suppressed because of the danger of copies falling into enemy hands, an explanation considered by Henderson to be 'frivolous, unwarranted, invalid and unworthy'in view of the Review's exclusive circulation to senior commanders and politicians.[69]

(Although the War Office was more tolerant of press criticism, it was not entirely averse to censoring, suppressing or punishing a journal which carried items critical of the competence of senior commanders. The Liberal journal, The Nation believed that the German tactical surprise in retiring behind the Hindenburg line in March 1917 had found the British army and its commanders 'wanting'. The War Office, with Lloyd George's active support, immediately imposed an export ban on The Nation for six months.[70] More predictably, a series of articles by H.G. Wells which on his own admission dealt with 'the defects of our military caste, its neglect of mechanism due to sheer ignorance and hostility to elementary science, its waste of men...its illiteracy, its facesaving...'[71] was stopped by Colonel Hutton-Wilson at G.H.Q. despite a plea on Wells behalf by the Press Bureau.[72])

But what aroused the gravest misgivings by the press both at home and abroad about Admiralty censorship was the Admiralty decision (for which Jellicoe was again largely responsible) to suppress news of the sinking of the battleship 'Audacious' in December 1914, stories and photographs of which appeared in all the world's newspapers except the British. The 'Audacious' was sunk off the coast of Ireland on the 26th of October 1914 by a German mine. In his memoirs,Asquith describes how 'after heated discussion in the Cabinet, we resolved not to make public the loss at the moment' and that he had assented only on the grounds that (i) no lives were lost and (ii) the military and political

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69. Rear Admiral Henderson to Sir Graham Greene, 27th May 1915, Henderson Papers,Hen 10/1,Henderson Papers,National Maritime Museum, Greenwich.

70. P.R.O. Cab 23/2 w.c. 119/24.

71. Wells to Press Bureau, U/D December 1917, P.R.O. 139/16/A636/Part/2/23.

72. Swettenham told Hutton Wilson on 12th January 1918 that in the Bureau's opinion 'Mr. Wells commands a very large audience and we think it would be a mistake to annoy him unless it must be done in the public interest', ibid.

situation is such that to advertise at this moment (with Turkey on the brink of a possible declaration of war on the Allied side) a great calamity might have very bad results'.[73] The Press were informed by Buckmaster on the 28th of October 1914 that 'a battleship had been lost' and that 'the immediate knowledge of this loss might so seriously affect our foreign relations that the Press are earnestly requested to treat this information as strictly confidential and make no reference by comment or otherwise to this loss...'[74]

Admiral Jellicoe, in his book Grand Fleet recalled that his was the principal voice urging that the loss be kept a secret for as long as possible. He believed that the Grand Fleet, under his command in 1914, was considerably weakened at the time of the 'Audacious' sinking and that 'as a general policy it was desirable to conceal from the enemy any serious loss of which he would otherwise have no immediate knowledge...'[75] This last was a perfect summary of Admiralty press policy throughout the war but all credibility for maintaining such a silence over the 'Audacious' was lost when American newspapers broke the story in mid-December 1914 publishing photographs of the sinking vessel taken by passengers on a passing liner, the 'Olympic'. As Captain, later Admiral Sir Henry Richmond, then Assistant Director of Operations at the Admiralty recorded in a diary punctuated with vehement criticism of his superior officers '... they (the Germans) must know (about the 'Audacious) as the American papers already have accounts from passengers on the 'Olympic' who saw it'.[76]

Lord Stamfordham, Private Secretary to King George V, wrote to St. Loe Strachey, editor of The Spectator on the 17th of December 1914 enclosing photographs taken from the American papers with the comment : 'I cannot understand how the Government continues to affect silence regarding that catastrophe'.[77] Neither could the British press, which according to

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73. Earl of Oxford and Asquith, Memoirs and Reflections (London, Cassell & Co. Ltd, 1928),p.47.

74. D 109, 4th December 1914, P.R.O. HO 139/20/A756.

75. Admiral Sir John Jellicoe, The Grand Fleet, 1914-16 (London, Cassell & Co. Ltd, 1919),pp.152/3.

76. The Diaries of Sir Henry Richmond, 25th November 1914, Ric 1/10, National Maritime Museum, Greenwich.

77. Stamfordham to St. Loe Strachey, 12th December 1914, S/13/15/16. Strachey Papers, House of Lords Record Office.

Northcliffe, objected most strongly 'to being dragged into a conspiracy of silence'[78] over the affair. The Daily News commented that 'rumours of an event of very great interest to the British public have been circulating for a long time now in this country. Very full accounts of the event in question have now been given in the Swedish, the Dutch, the American and finally the German papers. There is scarcely an important public in the world ...which has not now received a full report of the alleged occurence, except the one which is most directly affected by it' (30th November 1914). The Times pointed out that 'the principle purpose of the censorship as we understand it, is to prevent publication of news which will be of service to the enemy. If the enemy knows the news, the publication in this country cannot be of service to them. Yet our office is littered with German newspapers containing news we are all forbidden to publish...we understand and appreciate the reasons which made reticence in such a case desirable for a limited period. But for how long does the Government propose to continue the farce of concealing facts from the British alone?' (1st December 1914).

Churchill, then First Lord of the Admiralty, was all set to end 'the farce' and confirm the sinking to the House of Commons when, on leaving the Admiralty building he was, according to Brownrigg, 'cajoled, and threatened and brow-beaten' by the First Sea Lord, Lord Fisher, and 'allowed himself to be turned away from his intended course and he remained silent on this point'.[79] Successive First Lords did the same, acting under the guidance of their Service chiefs who appear to have genuinely believed that the Germans would think the American stories a decoy and remain in doubt about the whereabouts of the 'Audacious'. In January 1915 the Edinburgh Review followed by the Daily Chronicle did in fact reveal the full story but the other papers continued to observe the officially inspired silence. Despite this and repeated references to the subject in Parliament, the Board of Admiralty refused to officially confirm the sinking which even in Brownrigg's view was a mistake which 'cost us the confidence of the public both here and abroad and gave the Germans a useful bit of propaganda to use against us'.[80]

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78. Northcliffe to Lord Murray of Elibank, 1st December 1914, Northcliffe MSS, Dep. 4890, British Library.

79. Brownrigg, op. cit. (1920) p.32.

80. ibid.

Perhaps the most outstanding example of press censorship undertaken to fulfill Buckmaster's second objective-to prevent the publication of news 'likely to cause needless alarm or distress among the civil population'[81] was the attempt made to control the reporting of air raids. At first there were no restrictions but as the raids increased so too did the instructions and D Notices (18 between 1915 and 1918) reflecting official uneasiness about public morale. At first there was some argument between the War Office and the Admiralty as to which department was responsible for issuing air raid instructions but in April 1915, Sir Graham Greene of the Admiralty agreed that all matters about 'visits of enemy aircraft' would be dealt with by the Admiralty.

An instruction had been given to the censors, by the War Office, in January 1915 that nothing was to be published about a raid unless there had been an official report and no stories were to be passed which 'were likely to cause panic'.[82] But reports of raids and of panic in areas such as the East End continued to appear in the papers and Buckmaster wrote to Greene on 23rd April 1915 informing him that 'this office is inundated with complaints and inquiries' about the official press policy on air raids'.[83] D 206 of 5th May 1915 sought to clarify the situation by reiterating that no unofficial reports were to be published before the official account of a raid and that no mention was to be made of the route of enemy aircraft or the amount of damage inflicted.

But the War Office complained that despite D 206, a raid on Southend had been fully reported in the London evening papers before any official report had been issued and which could prove of great value to the Germans in planning a major raid on London. Thus D 217 was issued on 1st June 1915 prohibiting the publication of any report of an air raid other than the official announcement. On 2nd February 1916 D 217 was withdrawn, to be replaced by D 352, a fifteen point instruction which continued the prohibition on all unofficial reports, but added the important clause that 'no account is to be published until it has been submitted to and passed by the Press Bureau'.[84]

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81. Notice to all officers of the Press Bureau op.cit.
82. P.R.O. HO 139/20/A784/Part 1.
83. ibid.
84. P.R.O. HO 139/44 .

On top of the additional work this involved for editors and censors, they were requested by D 597 of 19th September 1917 that 'nothing should be mentioned about casualties to sailors and soldiers in Air Raids' [85] and on 28th of September 1917 that 'In consequence of representations from the Commissioner of Police, the Press are very urgently requested to refrain from publishing further articles which add to the feeling of apprehension which is already prevalent specially amongst the poorest and most ignorant classes of the people of London'.[86]

With the same aim of preventing 'panic and distress to the population', censors were instructed to stop anything which smacked of 'sensationalism' and editors were requested to observe 'the strictest moderation... in regard to posters and headlines, in view of cultivating a correct sense of proportion in regard to the events of the war'.[87] For the same reasons, censors were told to stop any reports of explosions or cases of T.N.T. poisoning at munitions factories and to eliminate any references to the outbreak of epidemics (D 215, 29th May 1915).[88] Believing that it might cause 'distress' to respectable families whose daughters had entered the nursing profession, the War Office ordered the Bureau to stop all 'pictures of European nurses attending wounded native soldiers'.[89] In 1916, the entire Hearst network of newspapers were prohibited from using the British cables system owing to Hearst's persistent re-writing of copy from his London correspondent which, the Bureau argued, was causing panic and distress when such stories were picked up and repeated by British and neutral newspapers. On the 2nd of June 1916 at the time of Jutland, Hearst's New York American ran a story that the Germans had sunk fourteen British battleships which led the Daily Mail to accuse the Admiralty of a cover-up.[90] But it was Hearst's Chicago Examiner re-write of a brief message from Tewson, Hearst's man in London, blowing up the story of a Zeppelin raid into a full page account of 'London in Flames' a capital 'in ruins' which led to the Hearst suspension - a ban which remained in force until April 1918.[91]

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85. P.R.O. HO 139/45.
86. Ibid.
87. P.R.O. HO 139/19.
88. P R.O. HO 139/43.
89. ibid., 8th June 1915.
90 P.R.O. HO 139/28/A1057/Part 1 & 2.
91. Ibid., The Germans sank 3 battle cruisers, 8 destroyers and 3 cruisers, (Taylor, op. cit., (1963) p.143.

Finally to Buckmaster's third objective in carrying out the censorship, that it should prevent the publication of news objectionable on political grounds, news for example affecting 'the susceptibilities of the Allied Countries'.[92] To judge from Press Bureau files, this last point was taken very seriously by all the Bureau's Directors throughout the war. When the Belgian High Command complained that a story in the Daily Mail on the 5th of January 1915 alleging that a Belgian railway official had been shot for betraying secrets to the Germans was 'grossly inaccurate' and insulting to Belgian honour, Swettenham wrote to Thomas Marlowe, editor of the Mail reminding him that '...it is a serious matter when our Allies find it necessary to make a complaint of this kind'.[93] The Daily Mail published an apology. An article written in September 1917 by Colonel A.M. Murray for publication in the Sunday Pictorial which was critical of the former French Commander-in-Chief, General Nivelle, was censored on Swettenham's authority because as Swettenham told the War Office, 'it seems to me very mischievous to allow our Press to criticise an Allied General or late Commander-in-Chief because it would be resented by his nationals and might lead to similar criticisms of our High Command by an Ally.'[94]

In an instruction to censors on the 15th of October 1914 Buckmaster revealed just how much importance the authorities attached to the question of Allied opinion : '...treat the outward cables to America with a very light hand. Let German news go through unless it contains grave abuse of our Allies. Do not mind abuse of ourselves. Treat information as to alleged fighting more generously than you would for Home publication.'[95] Buckmaster expanded on the thinking behind such a policy in a letter to Richard Lumsden, a British diplomat in Chile in April 1915 : 'We came to the conclusion that...the right course was to let the German messages through, relying on the fact that their statements would in the end be shown to be false and the result could only be that their news would be discredited...(but)...we do not permit them to publish untruthful statements about our Allies as that might lead to misunder-

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92. 'Notice to all Officers of the Press Bureau', op. cit.

93. Swettenham to Marlowe, 19th January 1915, P.R.O. HO 139/6/A169/18.

94. Swettenham to Colonel Cockerill, War Office, 28th September 1917, P.R.O.HO139/24/940/17.

95. Buckmaster to Major Little, Military Censor, Press Bureau - P.R.O. HO 139/13/A488/.

standings between ourselves and them...'[96] It was a somewhat patronizing attitude and one which infuriated American correspondents in London who were aware that their copy was censored along similar lines. But it revealed a shrewd appreciation of the likely effect of extravagant German statements on United States opinion which never seriously threatened the influence of the British press.

So sensitive were the censorship authorities to Allied opinion that when Constables submitted a book about the Russian Revolution in July 1917 they were advised against publication on the grounds of the book's 'mischievous' pro-Czarist views which might upset the new regime.[97] And requests from Allied Governments for items to be censored were treated with equal seriousness. When the French Admiralty requested press silence over German submarine attacks in the Nice/Marseilles area censors were instructed on the 13th of February 1917 that 'No sinkings of Neutral or Allied Shipping other than the British are to be published in our Press'.[98]

The policy adopted by the censorship authorities towards copy which was critical of foreign or Allied governments was well described by Sir Edward Cook when Belgian politicians raised objections to criticisms made about them by the L'Indépendence Belge which was published in Britain. Cook told the Foreign Office that if the editor was to be treated like an English journalist criticising the English Government 'his matter would be seldom interfered with', but if he was to be treated as an English journalist criticising the Government of a friendly or Allied Power 'in that case the exercise of the censorship, in accordance with the Defence of the Realm Regulations would be much more strict'.[99] Cook added the provision, which we should bear constantly in mind in assessing the power of the censorship that 'this office has no power to compel any person to submit matter for censorship'.[100]

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96. Buckmaster to Lumsden, 22nd April 1915, P.R.O. HO 139/7/A248/Part 1/8.
97. Foreign Office to Press Bureau, 7th August 1917, P.R.O. HO 139/34/AI490/Part 1/3.
98. Admiralty to Press Bureau, P.R.O. HO 139/27/AI036/Part 3/153.
99. Cook to Foreign Office, 4th May 1915, P.R.O. HO139/16/A644/8.
100. ibid., Sir Edward Grey advised the Bureau to treat articles, if submitted, by L'Indépendence Belge asif written by English journalists critical of an Allied government.

It was a policy which included within its compass neutral states and countries of the Empire. Great care for example was taken not to offend American neutrality by too strong an advocacy of American participation in the War for as a Foreign Office memorandum to editors observed in February 1916 : 'It is understood that Americans prefer to do their own criticisms of the President and the Administration (Wilson was seeking re-election at the time) and the Administration will correspondingly resent outside criticisms'.[101] The Foreign Office stopped publication of a book by Alistair Harris (voluntarily submitted for censorship) which had alledged an unhelpful attitude on the part of United States consuls towards British P.O.W.'s.[102] Norman Angell, the well known journalist and pacifist submitted an article about American participation in the war for publication in the American magazine New Republic in March 1917. It was stopped by the Bureau without reference to the Foreign Office, on the grounds that it would offend American opinion in suggesting that in the light of American loans and supplies to the Allies, America was already a participant on the Allied side.[103]

When it came to Imperial considerations, the effect of the war on Indian nationalism was a prime concern of the censorship authorities. Reuters telegrams reporting disturbances and house arrests in Calcutta were suppressed in September 1914 on the orders of Lord Crewe, Secretary of State for India. Lord Hardinge, the Viceroy complained to Kitchener in November 1914 that military press bulletins which expressed surprise at the good behaviour of Indian troops in France were, not surprisingly, causing deep resentment on the Subcontinent. The Congress newspaper, India was told to submit all copy about the war to the military censors at the Bureau following an article it published in February 1916 which called for Indians to have an equal chance of commissions as 'English gentlemen'. In November 1916 Professor Charles Oman, the distinguished

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101. Foreign Office Memorandum, 1916, P.R.O. HO 139/39.

102. P.R.O. HO 139/33/A1428/Part 1.

103. P.R.O. HO 139/27/A1036/Part/51.Censors had been instructed that 'no adverse criticism of America with regard to the loan should be passed without reference', ibid.

historian, at that time responsible for the supervision of the Press Bureau's book censorship advised the publishers of a book by Lajot Raj not to go ahead with publication on the grounds that it was 'a seditious book (which) revels in the abuse of the Indian Government'.[104]

Also of concern, in the light of the 'enormous number of Moslem subjects of the Crown' was the way in which the press treated Turkey. Editors were reminded by the Press Bureau in February 1916 that 'nothing should be published of a nature to throw contempt on the Sultan of Turkey, who is still regarded as the Khalif by millions of British subjects nor yet to disparage needlessly the Turkish people'. When The Graphic ignored this advice by publishing on the 7th of April 1916 a stridently anti-Turkish cartoon, its export sales to the Middle East were banned on the grounds that the cartoon 'illustrated the triumph of the Cross over the Crescent (a mosque depicting Turkey was shown being hurled from Asia) and thereby introduces the idea of the "Holy War" '.

A similar concern was expressed by the Foreign Office in 1917 over Arab opinion which it was feared might be offended by exuberant expressions of that racial prejudice so commonly found in government and press circles of the time. Arthur Hirshel of the Foreign Office told Swettenham on the 15th of March 1917 that Sir Stanley Maude, Commander-in-Chief in Mesopotamia would be publishing an important proclamation in Baghdad about Arab aspirations and 'It is therefore more than usually desirable to keep out of the newspapers any disparaging remarks about the Arabs - their cut-throat habits, looting of Baghdad and all that kind of thing...'[105]

As for Buckmaster's news 'objectionable on political grounds',[106] all official press censorship is political in that it serves the principal objectives of government and those in executive authority, which in the period 1914-18 were to wage successful war. Although the Bureau consistently

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104. The examples cited in this and the following paragraph are all to be found in P.R.O. 139/33.

105. P.R.O. HO 139/27/A1036/Part 4/249.

106. 'Notice to all Officers of the Press Bureau', op. cit.

claimed a non-political role in that it remained independent of any party influence and in no way interfered directly with expression of opinion, the authorities through the censorship did act on behalf of the establishment and orthodox Service interests against the political opponents of the war, anti-conscriptionists, pacifists and socialists. A splendid example of this was the way in which the censorship system was used to promote the views of the military authorities over the issue of conscription. The anti-conscriptionist Nation heralded the result of the Derby voluntary enlistment scheme as a great victory in 'the battle of freedom...the people have won it, even The Times (pro-conscriptionist) hardly contests their victory, the country will emerge from the war with its capital institutions intact' (3oth October 1915). Brade of the War Office speedily reacted by issuing through the Bureau a Private Notice to leading editors describing The Nation's claims as 'absolutely inaccurate and misleading... Lord Derby trusts that editors will refrain from repeating the statements of The Nation.'[107] Most newspapers in this particular instance had taken an opposite view to that of the The Nation without any urging from Brade.

Over pacifism there were problems for the authorities in that there were few specifically pacifist newspapers and the Bureau publicly espoused a policy of free speech and opinion. But it lost no opportunity in promoting an anti-pacifist line by warning censors and editors, to beware of any 'speculations about peace terms (which) are often of enemy origin'[108] and of advising printers who submitted pacifist leaflets or books against publication. When for example in March 1918 the Botolph Printing Company submitted Harold Begbie's book about the appalling prison conditions being endured by conscientious objectors, they were told by the Bureau that ' it was not advisable in the National Interest to publish the book (and) in our opinion it might make the publisher liable to prosecution under D.O.R.A.'.[109] Such clear hints of possible prosecution

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107. Private and Confidential Notice to the Press, 30th October 1915, P.R.O. HO 139/21 / A798/Part 4/73.

108. P.R.O. HO 139/36/A1614.

109. Press Bureau to Botolph Printers, 6th March 1918, ibid.

or in some cases the threat to confiscate printing plant appear to have frightened off the few printers who submitted such copy but they gave authors like Begbie the excuse to describe the censorship as '...a tyranny that shuffles and protests innocence'[110] - an accusation which will be examined in more detail in Chapter V.

Action against socialist-inspired labour unrest was more direct. Requests for the censorship of news or rumours of industrial disputes, strikes or lock-outs were frequently received by the Bureau, principally from the Ministry of Munitions. William Beveridge, Permanent Secretary of the Ministry told the Bureau on the 16th of October 1915 that 'The Minister (Lloyd George) regards it as of importance that as little publicity as possible should be given (to the possibility of) a strike of somewhat serious nature affecting the shipbuilding and engineering trade(which) may break out upon the Clyde'.[111] The Bureau duly obliged with D 285 that same day requesting the press to make no reference, direct or indirect to the possibility of trouble on the Clyde : 'The Directors... feel sure that the press will, in the national interest, do all that is possible to avoid giving publicity to reports on the subject'.[112] When workers at the Elswick engineering works on the Tyne voted to down tools in December 1915 Beveridge requested the Bureau 'to stop publication of a telegram sent by the Newcastle correspondent of the Weekly Dispatch which had outlined the workers' demands'.[113] Censors were instructed on the 23rd of March 1917 'to stop all references...to the strike at Barrow ...the position is decidedly bad'.[114] And so the instructions continued until, as we shall discuss again in the following chapter, censorship of industrial disputes was discontinued in 1918.

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110. Begbie to Cook 20th December 1918, P.R.O. HO 139/36/A1614.

111. Beveridge to Press Bureau, 16th October 1915, P.R.O. HO 139/44.

112. ibid. An examination of the press for the period suggests that the D Notice was observed but a strike duly occurred the following week which was reported.

113. Beveridge to Press Bureau, 6th December 1915, P.R.O. HO 139/27/A1036/Part1/77.

114. F Mitchell, Press Bureau Secretary, Instruction to Censors, P.R.O. HO 139/27/A1036/Part 4/255.

We shall return to discuss the implications of the censorship against socialist and pacifist organizations in Chapter V but it is worth noting at this juncture that it was not only left wing minority journals which suffered for their political views at the hands of the censor or civil authorities and again with the active encouragement of fellow journalists. In December 1915 Christobel Pankhurst's violently jingo paper Britannia published a War Office memorandum written by Brigadier General Howel (which appears to have been shown to certain editors)[115] arguing that a German success against Serbia might work to the strategic advantage of the Allies. Britannia , besotted with the cause of Serbia, dubbed Howel, along with Sir Edward Grey the Foreign Secretary as a pro-German and called for his dismissal. E.R. Robbins wrote to the Bureau asking : 'ought such scandalous statements be allowed'? and J.S.R. Phillips, editor of the Yorkshire Post wondered 'if any prosecuting authority has the courage of a louse that might enable it to prosecute Miss Christobel Pankhurst and the publishers of Britannia...' H.A. Gwynne editor of the Morning Post thought '...that woman really ought to be put in jail'.[116] No prosecution ensued in this case because as Swettenham told Gwynne, the D.P.P. 'fear to give advertisement'[117] to Pankhurst's utterances. But later that month, Britannia's premises were raided and the journal reduced from fourteen pages to one typewritten sheet.

The supreme irony in all this is that much later in the war in February 1918 Gwynne was writing to the Bureau complaining that '....some of your excisions seem to be verging on the political'[118] (over the censorship of articles by Repington critical of Lloyd George's alleged interference with the military conduct of the war) and Gwynne and Repington certainly regarded their prosecution later that same month

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115. Gwynne wrote to Swettenham that '...I was allowed to see a copy of it at one time' but as a 'responsible' journalist of course nothing appeared about it in his paper. Gwynne to Swettenham, 14th December 1915, P.R.O. HO 139/23/A911/Part2/9.

116. Robbins to Press Bureau, 13th December 1915, Phillips to Press Bureau, 13th December 1915, Gwynne to Press Bureau, 14th December 1915, ibid.

117. Swettenham to Gwynne, 16th December 1915, ibid.

118. Gwynne to Swettenham, 28th February 1918,P.R.O. HO139/12/A458/ Part 1/6b.

for publishing details of the Inter-Allied Reserve Scheme as politically inspired by the Prime Minister. Gwynne was to return to the charge in May 1918 over the rejection by the Bureau (on War Office instructions) of an article defending General Maurice (who had been dismissed from the army over his criticisms of Lloyd George in the press) which, wrote Gwynne, 'seems to give indications of political censorship, for which the Press Bureau has been happily free'.[119]

The Russian Revolution and more especially the Bolshevik take-over frightened the authorities almost as much as the threat of a German victory and the censorship of messages to and from Russia after March 1917 was perhaps the most overtly political role played by the Bureau during and after the war. In the early days of the Revolution, telegrams of support from British organizations such as the Workers and Soldiers Councils in Leeds and Newcastle were passed on Foreign Office authority on the grounds that 'the Workers and Soldiers Council was then the controlling power in Russia and it was felt that there was a risk of alienating them if we interfered with their friends' telegrams'.[120] By June 1917 with Kerensky more firmly in control this policy was reversed and all cables to and from London supporting Bolshevik policies such as the calls for an immediate peace were heavily censored.[121] There was one notable exception to this rule. The Foreign Office were convinced that Arthur Ransome, (of children's book fame) Petrograd correspondent of the Daily News had become 'thoroughly converted' to the Bolshevik cause. When the Daily News transferred him to Stockholm the Foreign Office suggested to the Bureau that his messages be examined but allowed to go through as he would remain a useful source of intelligence. The Bureau was told by Stephen Gaselee of the Foreign Office to 'go on looking closely at the messages he sends cutting out what is actually harmful but still I hope leaving enough for him to

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119. Gwynne to Press Bureau, 15th May 1918, P.R.O. HO 139/13/A523/Part3/43.

120. Foreign Office Minute, 18th August 1918, P.R.O. HO 139/27/A1036/Part 4/248.

121. The Foreign Office considered that 'nearly all' the Russian press correspondents in London were by August 1918 sending 'mischievous messages' which were to be stopped. ibid.

go on sending messages and his paper keep him where he is'.[122]

By November 1917 with the Bolsheviks in power Swettenham was writing to Hankey, Secretary to the War Cabinet, expressing his concern about messages from Russia (which he had stopped) which 'are propaganda in the interests of an immediate peace or a separate Russian peace which if published here will be used by the I.L.P. or the U.D.C. or similar pacifists...in these messages the Allies are referred to almost as though they are the enemies'.[123] To Carson, propaganda overlord at the time, Swettenham was more direct : 'There appears to be only one way to deal with it (Bolshevik propaganda) and that is to authorise us to pass, stop or censor all such messages at our discretion, without regard to existing instructions that cablegrams dealing with foreign affairs are to be passed to the addressees uncensored'.[124] Carson read Swettenham's letter to the War Cabinet on the 29th of November 1917 where it was agreed that the Press Bureau should censor Bolshevik propaganda. Henceforth the Bureau stopped such messages as Stalin's'Appeal to the Moslem World' in December 1917 which urged a world-wide revolt against Imperial oppression (considered by the India Office to be 'potentially mischievous in the highest degree')[125] and all messages calling for an immediate peace such as Trotsky's from Brest Litovsk in December 1917.

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122. Gaselee to Press Bureau. 19th August 1918, P.R.O. HO139/35/1584/Part 1/1.
Like his dispatches before the Bolshevik takeover, Ransome's messages from Stockholm were not so much pro-Bolshevik as fairly accurate assessments of the real situation in Russia rather than what the Foreign Office and Allied statesmen would have liked it to be. In reporting attempted 'officers plots' and 'Peasant Risings Against the Bolsheviks' his comment was : 'I am inclined to think it will be more difficult than the plotters imagine to get even momentarily support among the masses' (Daily News, 20th August 1918).

123. Swettenham to Hankey, 25th November 1918, ibid.

124. Swettenham to Carson, u/d, cited by Carson, War Cabinet meeting, 29th November 1917. P.R.O. Cab 23/4,w.c.268/8.

125. Sir T. Holderness to Press Bureau, 7th December 1918, P.R.O. HO 139/35/1584/Part 1/1.
This message however was shown to the editor of The Daily Telegraph as his newspaper 'is so public spirited and high principled', Cook, Press Bureau Minute, 7th December 1917, ibid.

In this chapter we have examined the fundamental objectives of the press censorship, the difficulties of staff and departmental liaison faced by the Bureau in carrying out those objectives and we have looked at the major areas in which the censorship operated. Some of the censorship decisions were readily understood and accepted by the press, usually those which contained clear tactical information such as news of troop movements or prospective operations. But strong objections were made (to which we shall be returning in Chapter VI) to decisions such as the ban on soldiers letters and regimental names which in most cases were manifestations of over anxious officialdom but which were viewed by the press as attempts to disguise failures and imcompetence.

There was ambiguity in the manner in which press material was stamped 'Passed for Publication'which also upset editors. As far as the Bureau was concerned such a stamp on an item did not necessarily imply official approval and editors were constantly being reminded that it was still up to them to exercise their judgement 'in the national interest'. Herbert Samuel,Home Secretary in 1916,summarised this policy at a time when the number of pacifist leaflets submitted to the Bureau by wary printers was on the increase:'The function of a censorship is to prohibit that which must not be published and which will be the subject of proceedings if it is published; but not to give anything in the nature of an endorsement to everything else however objectionable it may be'.[126] But this was a policy which infuriated editors who regarded it as bureaucratic cowardice, backing away from clear cut decisions and leaving many items in a grey area where publication might expose editors and proprietors to possible prosecution under D.O.R.A. When Gwynne of the Morning Post submitted an article about the sinking of the 'Formidable' in January 1915 (and by inference very critical of Admiralty procedures which it was argued had also led to the loss of Craddock's squadron in the South Atlantic and three cruisers in the North Sea),the Bureau was

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126. Samuel to Sir Edward Troup, Permanent Secretary, Home Office, 30th October 1916, P.R.O. HO 139/23/A911/23.

told by Brownrigg that '...Admiralty opinion is that harm will be done by its publication' but because there was no military reason why it could not be published 'it is therefore for the Editor of the Newspaper in question to use his discretion'[127] As a good patriot when told of Brownrigg's opinion Gwynne took the hint and dropped the article but under strong protest : 'The situation...is that a Department which is indirectly criticized advises that the criticism should be dropped because it considers it would be harmful' and further avoids responsibility for its actions by putting the onus to publish on to the Morning Post 'when it should have been borne by the Press Bureau'.[128]

But it would be misleading to infer from the cases which have been discussed in this chapter that the censorship was some kind of highly efficient sieve through which all news for public consumption was carefully sifted before release. Certainly all incoming and outgoing press cablegrams were censored and as the Press Bureau figures for 1916 show, the censorship of these did comprise a major part of the Bureau's work But telegraphic news formed only part of the contents of British newspapers which were made up of a vast range of home news, leaders and feature articles, censorship of which was purely voluntary. Indeed as we have seen, many of the cases in which the Bureau became involved were only brought to its attention by either voluntary submission or press attention. In the following two chapters we shall examine the effectiveness and power of the censorship and find out just how much control the authorities had over the press. We shall see that such power and influence lay not so much in the ability to suppress items or threaten prosecutions (although such actions were not lightly received by the press) but far more as we have caught glimpses of in this chapter, by the manipulation of press coverage and opinion through the D Notice system which was effectively the backbone of the entire censorship operation.

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127. Brownrigg to Press Bureau, 12th January 1915, P.R.O. HO 139/13/A523/Part 3/4.

128. Gwynne to Press Bureau, 18th January 1915, ibid.

CHAPTER IV

Effectiveness

'It is difficult to point to a single useful result or a single beneficial effect upon public opinion which the war censorship has attained. W. MacDonald, The Nation, 13th September 1917.

In 1915 Sir Stanley Buckmaster, Director of the Press Bureau,told the Admiralty that he believed 'the Censorship has been of great use to the Government in the conduct of the War...'.[1] In their memorandum on the censorship submitted to the War Cabinet in 1917 Buckmaster's successors, Swettenham and Cook declared that 'we have been very careful to prevent the publication of information useful to the enemy'.[2] As we have seen much of the work of the Bureau was geared to this objective but how much valuable information, if any, did the Central Powers glean from the British press despite the operation of the Censorship?

From the moment that a total and voluntary press silence was observed over the embarkation of the British Expeditionary Force (B.E.F.) to France in August 1914, newspapers and periodicals cooperated with the Service Departments, through the Bureau, to prevent the publication of troop movements and other information that could have been of use to the enemy. The achievement of moving an entire expeditionary force to France without a word in the press, resulting in a major strategic surprise for the enemy, must be counted as a singular success for such a voluntary press censorship system.

But at various times, items did appear in the press, usually pieces which had not been submitted for censorship (mainly in the provincial press which submitted far less material than Fleet Street papers) which the Service departments considered could be or had been of use to the enemy. Following a visit by Swetteham and Cook to G.H.Q. in September 1915 when they discussed censorship matters with Colonel Warburton Davies

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1. Buckmaster to Sir Graham Greene, 22nd January 1915, P.R.O. HO 139/11/A411/Part 2.
2. 'The Official Press Bureau', op. cit.

(the officer currently responsible for the operation of field censorship) the Bureau published a lengthy D Notice (D 279) on the 29th of September 1915 aimed at reminding the press 'of the assistance which may be given to the enemy by indiscreet letters, articles or pictures in our papers'[3] The Notice recognised that the press were anxious to prevent assistance being given to the enemy but 'harm may sometimes be done by inadvertence because the bearing of seemingly insignificant information is not always appreciated'.[4] Because German Intelligence scrutinized the British press, nothing should be published which, while seeming innocuous to an editor, might provide certain and prompt confirmation of rumours or information learnt from elsewhere'.[5]

Clearly a number of items listed as examples of things not to mention such as a too detailed account of a soldier's career in an obituary or too much information in a casualty list were the sorts of information looked for by British Military Intelligence in German papers. But some of the 'indiscretions' listed were examples taken from items which had appeared in the British press which G.H.Q. believed had been of operational use to the enemy. Details had been given of units, regiments and place names in descriptive narratives of incidents and in particular 'the position of Artillery Observation Stations have sometimes been disclosed in the Press with the sequel that the stations have been shelled, lives lost and the places could no longer be used'.[6] This was a direct reference to an article by Repington published in The Times on the 18th of May 1915 under the title 'Great Night Attack' in which he described how he had got 'an excellent view from La Couture (an observation station) of the German position which we attacked...

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3. P.R.O. HO 139/43.
4. ibid.
5. Brade of the War Office was very critical of this four page booklet : 'it is quite impossible for an editor to guarantee that these precepts shall be observed...Editorial offices are not manned by highly trained officials nor is there time in the conditions in which papers are produced and in the stress imposed by keen commercial competition to read through with close attention to all the considerations advanced by the Bureau'. War Office Minute, 1/10/15. P.R.O. WO 32/4893.
6. D 279, 29th September 1915, P.R.O. HO 139/43.

When the observation station itself was attacked a week later, Haig sent a stiff note to the War Office blaming Repington and recommending that 'no newspaper correspondent be allowed to come so close to the front during active operations'.[7] (The article had got through The Times without being censored because, as Swettenham complained to Brade, 'several times telegrams have been received from Repington with a note from MacDonough[8] saying "No objection to publication" ').[9]

It was inevitable that before the establishment of accredited war correspondents at G.H.Q., whose despatches were censored both there and sometimes at the Press Bureau, accounts of incidents by roving correspondents in Belgium or France or items picked up from the neutral press, contained information which the Services considered useful to the enemy but which slipped through the Press Bureau's cable censorship. In December 1914 Buckmaster issued a short list of these for the enlightenment of his censors under the title 'Sins Already Committed', items such as letters in The Times suggesting the presence of typhoid in the Belgian army which were 'untrue and encouraging to the enemy' and a story of the fall of shells at Lampernisse which had killed 130 men and 'which showed the Germans how easy and efficacious their night firing was (which) they have since continued'.[10] Major General Callwell in his memoirs refers to 'lapses on the part of overworked and weary (censors) poring over sheaves of proof-slips late at night' which led to 'Nearly all our newspapers publishing a Reuters message which stated the exact strength of the 3rd Belgian Division when it got back by sea to Ostend - not a very important piece of information but one that obviously ought not to have been allowed to appear. At a later date a journal in reporting His Majesty's visit to troops, contrived to acquaint all who it might concern that the 28th Division made up from regimental battalions brought from overseas, was about to cross the Channel'.[11]

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7. Cited in R. Blake (ed.) The Private Papers of Sir Douglas Haig 1914-19 (London, Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1952) p. 93.
8. Director of Military Intelligence and a close friend of Repington.
9. Swettenham to Brade, 17th May 1915, P.R.O. HO 139/5/A127/Part 2/30.
10. Press Bureau Minute, 10th December 1914, P.R.O. HO 139/11.
11. Callwell, op. cit.,(1920), pp. 322-3.

Although items like these did slip through, it is clear from War Office and Press Bureau files that no information was learnt by the German or other enemy forces from the British press which proved of vital tactical significance. When the metropolitan papers, through the N.P.A., complained in 1915 that the Bureau was neglecting to censor the provincial press, Admiral Hall was requested to make a thorough examination of the contents of provincial newspapers. On two separate occasions in 1915 the Liverpool Daily Post had published an account of the supposed capture of a 'super' German U Boat, a story that had been passed by mistake by a naval censor at the Press Bureau; Hall discovered that the Birmingham Daily Mail on 3rd November had run a story about the allegedly poor equipment of the French Territorials and that on 6th November the Edinburgh Evening News gave details of recruitment figures which had been prohibited by the Bureau. But Hall's principal conclusion was that he had found 'very little of an objectionable nature'.[12] As Asquith, by no means an admirer of the press, commented in the House of Commons on the 11th of March 1918 : 'On the whole the Press has discharged its duty during the war with patriotism. It has never, in any conspicuous or important instances, given away confidential information to the service of the enemy...'[13]

In all this we are constantly reminded that the censorship was in part voluntary, that when it came to preventing a rumour about a naval engagement in the North Sea appearing in a Scottish paper or the story of a damaged ship arriving at Chatham or a wounded soldier's story appearing in a Welsh paper, the censorship authorities at the Press Bureau had little executive control. Censorship was in many instances in the hands of editors who, as we shall see in Chapter VI, were themselves no mean censors. But would the appearance of such stories in obscure provincial journals result in the enemy learning valuable information? It is extremely unlikely that copies of the Merthyr Gazette or the Epworth Bells would reach Berlin but government departments, without providing any evidence, argued doggedly throughout the war that '... the enemy...profit by indiscretions in our Press...publication therein is one of the chief sources of his information'.[14]

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12. Hall to Press Bureau, 13th November 1915, P.R.O. HO 139/10/12.
13. House of Commons Debates, 5th Series, 11th March 1918, Col. 116.
14. 'Press Bureau Official Instructions', May 1916, P.R.O. Cab 21/93.

British officials appear to have had in their mind the image of an almighty German Intelligence Department which spent its time and energy raking over thousands of British newspapers for any item which might assist them in winning the war. Writing to Riddell on 11th June 1915 the Press Bureau explained that mention of fires at a Ministry of Munitions factory or 'even to report strikes or of lock-outs' was forbidden because such events 'might seriously interfere with production (which) will give the enemy if he counts as he will do the time it will take us to supply all our wants and give assistance to our Allies'[15] - the official view seeming to be that the enemy was a devilishly clever foe capable of turning such reported accidents and disputes to his advantage. And this was a frame of mind which by 1918 had clearly infected some journalists. H.O. Hartley, editor of the Woolwich Herald wrote to the Bureau on 21st February 1918 complaining that two of his rivals had published details of recent air raids which Hartley argued '...must provide the enemy with the clearest proof that his bombs fell in the district enabling him the more easily to recognize his whereabouts in future raids'.[16] Hartley requested that the Bureau issue a D Notice 'prohibiting reference to raids in all papers of a local character'.[17] It is an indication of the cooperation which the Bureau relied upon from editors, particularly of local journals for the operation of the censorship that as Hartley pointed out : 'for some time the editors of most of the papers in South East London have agreed among themselves to suppress all references to raids in their localities' , although 'one or two have stood out... and in some cases I fear reports have been published which have never been submitted'.[18]

When in 1917 Northcliffe objected to the stopping of a story about British drifters being used as decoys to lure German U Boats - 'the type of simple narrative that is being "killed off" as we say by

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15. P.R.O. HO 139/27/A1036/Part 1/80.
16. Hartley to Press Bureau, P.R.O. HO 139/19/A724/Part 6/96.
17. ibid.
18. ibid.

your people'.[19] Carson, then First Lord of the Admiralty, replied that '...the First Sea Lord and the War Staff regard it as vital that the doings of these "decoys" should be as secret as possible...the details ...would be of immense value to the commanders of enemy submarines and would give them an insight into our methods'.[20] But an unsuccessful encounter with just one such decoy would have been enough insight for German naval intelligence without any recourse to 'simple narratives' in the Daily Mail. This belief that German intelligence could pick up and use such stories reflects the then British obsession with the alleged superiority of Teutonic efficiency. Ironically Lundendorff in his memoirs has little good to say about the German Intelligence and official German press services which he considered far inferior to the British.[21]

What the Germans did learn and use in their propaganda and take into account in their strategic considerations which the Press Bureau was unable to prevent, was press comment and criticism of the way the war was being conducted by the Service departments and successive British governments. A Foreign Office document, prepared in 1915 for Cabinet circulation,[22] listed a number of cases of German newspapers, quoting strident criticisms which had appeared in British newspapers, particularly The Times and Daily Mail. From such comments, the German Government learnt of British shell shortages in 1915, of the growing public concern about the Dardanelles campaign in the summer of 1915, of the military concern over manpower and shipping losses and they must surely have been heartened to find out how many British journalists seemed to think British governments tended to be made up of 'Incompetent Bunglers' (Daily Mail 16th March 1915).

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19. Northcliffe to Carson, 5th May 1917, Northcliffe MSS, Volume V Carson, British Library.
20. Carson to Northcliffe, 7th March 1917, ibid.
21. General Ludendorff, My War Memories, 1914-1918, Vol 1 (London, Hutchinson & Co.Ltd. 1928) pp.361-378.
22. Foreign Office Minute, 1/11/1915, P.R.O. HO 139/30/A1180/1.

The Foreign Office document showed how German newspapers had for example made use of a scornful attack which the Daily Mail had made upon a speech by Kitchener in September 1915. Kitchener had declared that he believed that Germany was nearing the end of her resources and that Turkey had become demoralized. The Deustche Tageszeitung of the 22nd of September 1915 carefully repeated the Daily Mail's comment that Kitchener's remarks had come at a time when Germany had just taken Vilna and when American press correspondents had recently reported Turkey to be in good spirits .[23]

On 26th March 1917 the German wireless broadcast what Lord Derby described to the War Cabinet as 'long extracts from The Nation in which British strategy was compared unfavourably with that of the German and the strategic situation for the British painted in very gloomy colours'. The War Office imposed an export ban on The Nation on 29th March after consultation with Lloyd George on the grounds as Lord Derby explained to the Cabinet, that circulation of dangerous literature in this country might be tolerated because 'the character of the writer and that of the paper in which the literature appeared were known and might where necessary be discounted'.[24] But the official argument went on, abroad this distinction would not be made by foreign governments who might believe that The Nation 'spoke for the whole of British Liberalism'.[25] It was a weak argument to justify such action for in the same period the Frankfurter Zeitung cited both The Times and the Manchester Guardian as evidence that the German retreat (behind the Hindenburg line) had caused grave anxiety in Britain and the Wolff agency had used both the Daily Telegraph charges that the Board of Trade were disguising the shipping losses and the New Statesman's leader arguing that if the shipping losses continued then a peace might soon have to be concluded.

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23. Foreign Office Minute, op. cit.
24. War Cabinet meeting, 16th April 1917, P.R.O. Cab 23/2, w.c. 119/24.
25. ibid.

What the German press clearly relished were British press attacks on the censorhip itself. The Frankfurter Zeitung of 7th July 1915 delighted in quoting the Daily Mail's assessment of the effect of the censorship as having : 'Chloroformed the nation'.[26] The Kölnische Zeitung quoted at length The Times attack upon the censorship of an article by John Buchan which had contained a tribute to German bravery (but which also contained, according to the War Office, a detailed account of the battle of Loos which the military censors considered would be of assistance to the enemy).

When The Times described Britain as a place where 'discontent is now prevalent not only in certain classes but in all classes of society and what is read in newspapers is only a faint reflection of it. It covers diplomacy, the strategy, and the general conduct of the war'(15th October 1915) and when later on in the war, leader comments bitterly attacked Admiralty policy over shipping losses or army policy on the Somme and at Passchendaele, were such comments 'injurious to the Naval and Military Operations of the British Empire'?[27] Certainly the Foreign Office believed so and cited J.A. Spender, editor of the Westminster Gazette's comment that 'there ought to be some way of preventing the export of home-made libels'[28] but as the War Office realised the British press was too powerful and useful to silence and that such comments were in no way representative of the daily presentation of the war in the British press. What use was made of such comments in assessing Allied capabilities and morale was in any case more than dissipated by the strident blare of German propaganda which alienated rather than influenced neutral opinion.

The most effective and most sinister area of the Bureau's activities was its manipulation of what went in or what was left out of the press through the operation of the D Notice system -a method of control which could only have been accomplished through the active cooperation of most editors and proprietors.

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26. Foreign Office Minute, 1/11/1915. op.cit.
27. 'Notice to All Officers of the Press Bureau', op. cit.
28. J.A. Spender, speech to the I.O.J., 10th November 1915, P.R.O. HO 139/30/A1180/1.

During the first months of the Bureau's existence, the leading metropolitan editors made frequent briefing visits to Smith and later to Buckmaster. This procedure became too unwieldly and quickly excited the jealously of leading provincial editors like C.P. Scott of the Manchester Guardian who felt not only personally affronted at being excluded, but also that their Fleet Street rivals were stealing a march on them for the latest news. Thus the D Notice (so called to differentiate them from the Bureau's less private and confidential 'B'-'C' general information series) which already existed in embryo, was quickly expanded into a full-scale series,advising and instructing the Press as to what could or could not be published'.[29] 647 were issued during the war and a further 56 until April 1919 when the Bureau was closed, embracing every aspect of the war effort - military, naval, air raids, food shortage, foreign policy, industrial disputes, even the weather and as a War Office memorandum noted at the end of the war, they were 'loyally observed (by) the great mass of newspapers'[30] Most were sent as 'requests' to the press, a small number as 'instructions' which it was made clear could lead to possible prosecution if ignored. Booklets, four in all, known as 'Blue Books' were sent to editors containing 'the instructions which really matter'[31] together with the latest revisions.

With the creation of the Bureau and an increasing involvement by the N.P.A. in defending newspaper interests, the Joint Committee tended to meet rarely as the war progressed. But its secretary,E.A. Robbins, was also General Manager of the Press Association, and as he had already had experience of issuing the 'Parker' telegrams in the pre-war days he agreed to distribute the D Notices via the P.A. system. Lists of the editors who received the Notices or circulars were drawn up and periodically revised by Robbins in conjunction with the Directors of

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29. 'The Official Press Bureau', op. cit.
30. 'Military Press Control', Part 1, 1918, P.R.O. WO 32/9304, p.9.
31. 'The Official Press Bureau', op. cit.

the Press Bureau. By the end of the war, Robbins was keeping three such lists for distribution. Fleet Street and major provincial newspapers and periodicals received all the D Notices while 1400 smaller provincial papers received occasional notices and the less confidential circulars.

Only a select number of Fleet Street and provincial newspapers and periodicals, those on what Robbins called the '40 List', received in addition to the D Notices, most confidential and occasionally secret Notices considered by the authorities unsuitable for general release and to be used purely for background information. Newspapers and periodicals considered by the Bureau (and sometimes by Robbins on his own initiative) to have been uncooperative or negligent in the observation or care of the Notices were occasionally removed from the lists. In 1915 thirty five provincial papers were thus removed and in April 1917 Massingham editor of the Liberal weekly, The Nation was removed from the '40 List' for having returned his copy of the 1917 Blue Book of instructions with the comment that he was 'quite capable of conducting The Nation without instructions from the Bureau'.[32]

Left to a press organization, the distribution of the D Notices was certainly the most efficient aspect of the Bureau's work. It is also an indication of the close relationship which developed between important sections of the press and the censorship authorities that such an important task was left to a press man to organize and administer. There were upsets. As late in the war as February 1918 the Bureau was mortified to discover that twelve leading socialist papers were in receipt of all D Notices (although as Robbins observed, in his professional judgement no great harm had befallen the nation as a result).[33] The Bureau occasionally complained that Notices went astray or worse fell into the hands of politicians critical of the Bureau and Swettenham, in particular, tended to lash out at Robbins over such incidents.

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32. Massingham to Press Bureau, 2nd April 1917, P.R.O. HO 139/19/A724/Part 6/7.

33. Robbins to Press Bureau, 12th February 1918. ibid.

An amusing and for Robbins extremely annoying incident along these lines occurred in December 1916. Several Notices had been wrongly addressed and returned to the Bureau. Instead of talking the matter over with Robbins, Swettenham sent a letter stating that 'in consequence of the regrettable blunders which have recently been made...we are compelled to consider whether it may not be in the public interest that we should now perform this duty ourselves...which you have performed so long and so satisfactorily'.[34] At this stage an evil genie went to work and the letter arrived not at the Press Association but at Printing House Square addressed to a Mr. G.Robbins. Dawson, editor of The Times (and by no means an admirer of the Bureau) in returning the letter could not resist the comment that 'the regrettable blunders..do not seem confined to the work of Mr Robbins...your letter was addressed to Mr. G. Robbins instead of to Mr E. Robbins of the Press Association who may well doubt in the circumstances whether he can safely relinquish the duty "which he has performed so long and so satisfactorily" '.[35] Robbins, upset that his professional efficiency had been questioned in such a public manner, was only ameliorated after an abject apology from Swettenham. But with the aid of an addressograph provided by the Bureau, he continued to distribute the Notices for the remainder of the war. Swettenham's letter has about it that fractious and pompous tone which occasionally characterised the Bureau's relations with the press, explaining much of the hostility which the Bureau provoked from even the most cooperative of journalists such as Robbins and Sir George Riddell.

As a series the Notices are a miniature documentary of the four year war period presenting a fascinating insight into the fears and prejudices of those in authority, vividly reflecting their almost obsessive concern with how the war should be reported by the press. At first the Notices contain a haphazard selection of topics - background information about the cable censorship (D 26, 8th September 1914), care to be taken over the reporting of alleged German atrocities (D 42, 28th September 1914), and restrictions on the reporting of the weather

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34. Swettenham to Robbins, 16th December 1916, P.R.O. HO 139/19/A724/Part6/7

35. Dawson to Swettenham, 18th December 1916, ibid.
Swettenham's response to Dawson's action is an indication of the coolness which existed between the Bureau and The Times :'we hold a strong opinion that it is inexcusable that a third person when returning such a letter should make comments on its contents.' Swettenham to Dawson, 21st December 1917, ibid.

(D 80, 21st October 1914). Churchill, when First Lord of the Admiralty behaved as if he had discovered a new toy, ordering D Notices prohibiting reports of his movements each time he set off on one of his trips away from the Admiralty (eight Notices between September and October 1914), a practice which can only have reinforced the groundswell of press opposition to his unorthodox antics as First Lord.[36]

We have discussed in Chapter III the Notices which concerned the military and naval aspects of the war - troop movements, operational details, air raids, shipping losses which were in effect straight forward instructions about what not to publish, a working guide to both censors and editors. Editors may well have objected to or resented these restrictions on stories about the exploits of local regiments and heroes but they generally obeyed them, either from a fear of possible prosecution or more often it appears, from a sense of patriotic duty. As Major General Callwell states in his memoirs ; 'Newspapers almost always fell in readily with the wishes of the military authorities'.[37] Only one aspect of the war news proved of long term difficulty for the authorities to control through the operation of the D Notices - news about air raids.

The raids naturally brought the war to the nation's doorstep and successive D Notices calling for silence or restraint ran too much against the journalistic grain for many editors to bear. We saw in the last chapter how the Notices about the raids increased in severity between 1915 and 1917, when D 217 of June 1915 (prohibiting reports of raids until an official announcement) was ignored, particularly by East End papers.[38] Colonel de Watteville of the War Office called together leading editors in September 1917 for what can only be

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36. P.R.O. HO 139/43.

37. Callwell op. cit, (1920) p. 327.

38. In May 1915 the Jewish Chronicle was prosecuted for spreading reports likely to cause disaffection (Reg. 27) and the editor fined £5 - hardly a devastating blow even at 1915 prices and the reports of raids and damage sustained went on unabated.

described as a sound dressing down. He told them that the raids 'are calculated to touch us on the raw', that the Germans were able to learn from reading English newspapers precisely where their bombs had dropped and with what damage (although no evidence was produced to support this statement)[39] and he went on 'the question is whether the Press are going to supplement what the Germans know by giving them missing details...If you think you should earn your living at the cost of further deaths and further raids, all I can say is that you are a scandalous lot'.[40]

But a significant number of editors remained unmoved by such blunt admonitions. D 352 of February 1916 was aimed to curb these by forcing all newspapers to submit stories about air raids to the Press Bureau before publication. But it was impossible for provincial editors to ignore raids when they occured in their locality, particularly if they coincided with weekly deadlines with the result that local papers in the South East continued throughout the war to run 'alarming headlines, long reports of damage, harrowing tales of inquests, stories of crowds seeking shelter in the tubes...and of refugees flooding the country-side' which as D 601 of the 26th of October 1917 went on 'are much to be deprecated'.[41]

Notices like D 352 or D 601 were straightforward prohibitions or requests but many Notices were little more than subtle forms of propaganda and news manipulation, what George Orwell was later to describe as a '...kind of veiled censorship...though there is no definite prohibition, no clear statement that this must or must not be printed...official policy is never flouted' (Tribune, 7th July 1944). On the 12th of September 1914 the Bureau issued D 34 which referred to a 'feeling in Russia' that the British people did not appreciate the

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39. 'By carefully perusing descriptive articles and reports in the British Press' argued D 601 of 26th October 1917, 'the enemy's intelligence service must be able to judge the effect of each individual bomb dropped on London'. P.R.O. HO 139/45.

40. Press Bureau Memorandum, 5th September 1917, P.R.O. HO 139/20/A781/Part 5/54.

41. P.R.O. HO 139/45.

great exertions being made by Russia on behalf of the Alliance : 'The British Press can render a great service to the Alliance by taking every opportunity of recognizing the brilliant devotion with which Russia is discharging her particular obligations to the joint plan of campaign...'[42] The Foreign Office were concerned about the effect Russia's defeat at Tannenberg might have on public opinion particularly in the Liberal Press which had already expressed unease at having an 'Autocracy' for an ally. Following this 'suggestion', a number of Fleet Street papers began to 'render...service' with photographs and potted biographies of Russian generals (Daily Mirror, 15th September, Daily Sketch, 17th September 1914), an increased coverage of news and comment on the Eastern front in the Daily Telegraph and The Star and encouraging assessments by military writers like Repington that the news from Russia 'shows that all goes well in the East...Russia has gained a complete victory at Ravaruska...' (The Times 15th September 1914.) Repington continued to 'write up' the Russian effort throughout the remaining months of 1914 with constant references to Russian 'numerical superiority' (The Times, 7th December 1914) and of his great trust that 'although the Russians find it hard to exploit their undoubted and large numerical preponderance, it is only a question of time for them to smother the Germans and club them to death'. (The Times ,9th December 1914.)

On 30th October 1914 the Foreign Secretary Sir Edward Grey, issued a memorandum to the press, through the Bureau, drawing attention to the dangers of 'certain lines' [43] currently taken by newspapers which in the opinion of the Foreign Office caused harm in neutral countries. For example, that Germany was obtaining coal from Scandinavia, that Holland would be a useless ally and that Russia was slow to advance. Grey went on to advise the press to avoid any mention that the allies were in for a long war 'this tends to give the impression in France of a typically leisurely British attitude' and in a plea which has manifest itself many times since, he urged the press to refrain from saying anything which suggested that Britain had saved France from defeat.

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42. P.R.O. HO 139/39.
43. ibid.

Grey's memorandum met with a generous response. Sir Edward Russell, editor of the Liverpool Daily Post replied that 'so far as I am concerned such hints are welcome. One cannot but perceive how awkwardly indiscreet expression of press opinion complicates the work of the Foreign Office at such a time'.[44] And a leader in the Liverpool Daily Post on the 4th of November 1914 could have been written in the Foreign Office so close in tone was it to the officially requested attitude towards France ; 'The spirit of France in this war has won the homage of the civilized world and our national impulses and conduct have been the highest and best when they have most closely emulated those of our Allies'.

When the Bureau sent a further memorandum to the press on the advice of Grey in November 1915 advising them on 'the avoidance...of strong expressions of opinion...of a nature opposed to the sentiments or opinions of the Allies...in particular with regard to France where our Press is naturally highly valued and widely quoted',[45] he received a letter from Emsley Carr editor of The News of the World stating that 'I feel I am expressing the views of all journalists when I say that we shall always welcome letters such as that which you have written to me, keeping as it does, principles before us to which we might inadvertently not give sufficient prominence' [46] - written presumably in a prostrate position.

The Quarterly Review responded to the Foreign Office advice with a long article condemning newspapers which had published stories embarrassing to the Allies or potentially friendly neutrals (like the stories of a British offer of Cyprus in return for Greek participation in the war on the Allied side) - a point reinforced with words which must have brought satisfaction to the authors of the official memorandum... 'it is not what Germany thinks that matters but what effect certain news will have on our Allies and on neutrals. Our diplomacy has a most thankless task which is scarcely appreciated by the nation'. (January 1916).

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44. P.R.O. HO 139/39.

45. ibid.

46. Carr to Press Bureau, 18th November 1915, ibid.

Official 'advice' was occasionally given to individual editors. When The Passing Show requested to be placed on Robbins's D Notice distribution list the editor Comyns Beaumont was told that as his journal was read in France 'the duty of maintaining a favourable atmosphere among neutral countries and friendly relations with the Allied Powers is too obvious to need emphasis'.[47] To which Beaumont reassuringly replied that '...our comments and more especially our cartoons should be guided by a correct attitude towards the Allies'.[48] A week or so later The Passing Show published a full page cartoon of a German U Boat with its conning tower drawn as a skeleton entitled 'Kultur'. A picture of 'Uncle Sam' was hovering in the background above the caption : 'That's their idea of a new statue of liberty is it? I reckon it won't do on this side of the herring pond, anyway' (20th May 1916). On the 15th of July, a cartoon appeared on the front page depicting the Kaiser as a weather vane blown in all directions by the four principal allies and on the 2nd of September, again on the front page King Ferdinand of Bulgaria was pictured being simultaneously kicked on the nose and butted on his posterior by a Roumanian goat - all subtle stuff presumably inspired by a 'correct attitude' towards the Allies and neutrals.

When the editors objected to such 'advice' they tended to do so by letter to the Bureau rather than through the columns of their newspapers. When the Bureau requested the press to ignore a speech made by the jingo novelist William le Queux in August 1915 which had alleged the presence of 'Germans' in official places (a reference to the distinguished Foreign Office official, Sir Eyre Crowe), Palmer, the editor of The Globe wrote to the Bureau stating that 'I find it very difficult to do so...The Globe is strongly of the opinion that officials in the Government with direct German relationships ought not to be employed at this time. Here is the case (Crowe) of a German mother and German wife and yet I am asked...to suppress these most material facts'.[49]

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47. Press Bureau to Beaumont, 3rd May 1916, P.R.O. HO 139/19/A724/Part4/50.
48. Beaumont to Press Bureau, 5th May 1916, ibid.
49. Palmer to Press Bureau, 12th August 1915, P.R.O. HO 139/5/A97/14.

And suppress he did along with other Fleet Street papers. Although Riddell (chief proprietor of The News of the World) objected strongly to Press Bureau 'advice' not to publish photographs of Glasgow strike leaders, he again did so by letter and no criticism appeared in his newspaper . (He told the Bureau that photographs of 'Socialists should help to put people off them' to which Cook replied that 'I defer to your judgement on the question of whether the publication of one's protrait in The News of the World is an advertisement or a deterrent').[50]

Protection of influential individuals was not confined to the British Foreign Office. A Notice was sent to all editors at the time of Rasputin's death in January 1917 by Swettenham of the Press Bureau, stating that 'The Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs feels sure that Editors will appreciate the importance of avoiding, in any comments they may publish on the past career of Rasputin, any reference to the highest personage in Russia',[51] a consideration carefully observed in all the obituaries.

The ferocious hostility exhibited by many newspapers during the war towards pacifists and those calling for peace negotiations is perhaps not surprising when official notices like D 256 of 10th of July 1915 reminded the press that '...suggestions of separate peace terms are often made in enemy quarters; the repetition or discussion of such suggestions in the British press is generally undesirable'.[52] The 'Rule Book' of instructions to editors reminded them of Asquith's words in the House of Commons on the 1st of March 1915 that 'Those who talk of peace, however excellent their intentions, are, in my judgement, victims, I will not say of wanton, but of grievous self-deception. It is like the twittering of sparrows amid the stress and tumult of a tempest which is shaking the foundations of the world . The time to talk peace is when the great tasks, for which we and our Allies embarked on this long and stormy voyage, are within sight of accomplishment '[53]

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50. Riddell to Cook, 5th April 1916, Cook to Riddell, 6th April 1916, P.R.O. HO 139/10/31.
51. 3rd January 1917, P.R.O. HO 139/39.
52. P.R.O. HO 139/43.
53. P.R.O. HO 139/19/A724/Part4/50.

Later that month, E.R. Robbins was writing to the Bureau about the proposed resolutions to be debated at the forthcoming I.L.P. Conference at Norwich : 'considerable harm might be done', he wrote to Buckmaster, 'by the dissemination of such views during the progress of the War'. Should he distribute such pacifist opinions through the P.A. in the light of Press Bureau instructions? The P.A.should 'use its own discretion as to what is desirable in the national interest' he was told and so confident was the Bureau that Robbins would do so, that he was also instructed that there was 'no need to submit (the items) for censorship'.[54]

When leading pacifists like C.H. Norman attempted to put across their case in articles for the national press they were frustrated by a Notice like D 245 which stated that 'The Directors of the Press Bureau feel sure that it is only necessary to put the Press on their guard to make it impossible for Mr.Norman to succeed in his design..... publication of such views in this country could only embarrass the Government, cause anxiety to our Allies, give satisfaction to our enemies and danger to the national cause'.[55] Norman's article arguing that Britain was as guilty as Germany in not seeking a negotiated peace and that the War should be stopped was duly ignored apart from an oblique reference in a Daily Express leader warning its readers against 'Plotters...an irresponsible but highly organised faction' (10th July 1915).

As we have noted in the previous chapter, the Ministry of Munitions issued Notices advising editors on how to write up if at all, industrial accidents, disputes or strikes at munitions factories. Similarly the Board of Trade advised editors to observe the greatest

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54. Robbins to Press Bureau, 30th March 1915, Press Bureau to Robbins, 31st March 1915, P.R.O. HO 139/23/A911/Part 1/1.

55. D 245, 9th July 1915, P.R.O. HO 139/23/A911/Part 1/1. It had been a journalist, Francis Stopworth, editor of The World who had first brought the authorities's attention to Norman's article in a letter to the D.P.P. 'Ought not Justice..restrain him?', Stopworth to D.P.P. 5th July 1915, (copy), ibid.

care in reporting strikes or lock-outs. D 273 of the 16th of September 1915 advised the press 'especially in South Wales, both in the public interest and for their own protection ...(to) refrain from seeking interviews with or giving publicity to the views of leaders in strikes or lock-out movements'.[56] Here, as in the case of pacifist views, the D Notice is serving to reinforce and give official sanction to an attitude already taken up by most newspapers and their readers.[57] A reading of papers like the South Wales Echo and the Western Mail at any period of the war reveal a latent hostility towards the miners and their organizations which needed only a notice like D 273 to blossom into a fulsome vilification of all strikes as anti-patriotic and 'deserving of the most severe penalties' (Western Mail, 25th September 1915).

But it was not until late 1917 that the strength of this anti-socialist bias of the press appears to have dawned on the officials of the Ministry of Munitions and that such bias could be used 'in the national interest'. Sir Edward Cook wrote a memorandum to the censors on the 15th of January 1918 informing them that a Mr. Caird of the Ministry of Munitions had visited the Bureau and 'expressed opinion that it was desirable not to discourage the Press from publishing notices about strikes, the view of the Ministry now being that publicity is more likely to do good than harm'.[58] However, as late in the war as October 1918 the Board of Trade continued to request 'the Press..to make no reference to strikes at colleries in the Anthracite District of South Wales'.[59]

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56. P.R.O. HO 139/43.

57. 'Might I suggest a decoration for the South Wales miners', wrote one reader to the Morning Post, 'viz. an Iron Cross, if the Kaiser has not already bestowed it?' (5th July 1915).

58. Cook memorandum P.R.O. HO 139/25/A985/Part 4/75.

59. 22nd October 1918, P.R.O. HO 139/27/A1036/Part 7/50.

The Press Bureau was well aware of the role played by the D Notices and the degree of cooperation forthcoming from the press in their operation. As Swettenham told Hankey, Secretary to the War Cabinet on 20th January 1918 : 'our experience is that the Press are always ready to act in the national interest when a request is made to them with authority'.[60] A vivid example of this was press reaction to War Office requests made in 1916 about the campaign in Mesopotamia. The Times for example had been very critical of the conduct of the campaign, centred as it had become around the siege by the Turks of a British force under General Townshend at Kut-al-Amara. But a series of D Notices issued in April 1916, when it became clear to the War Office that Townshend would be forced to surrender, effectively eliminated mention of the siege in the newspapers. Its surrender on 1st May 1916 was reported in The Times in one brief paragraph and the War Office 'suggestion' that 'any controversial matter or recrimination on the conduct of the campaign should be postponed for some considerable time owing to the bad effect they have on neutrals and on our allies' [61] was dutifully observed. 'We see no advantage in elaborate comment on the reverse at Kut' declared The Spectator (6th May 1916). A straightforward request from a major department of state was thus acted upon by editors without a murmur. However reluctantly and with whatever ethical misgivings, they went along with it 'in the national interest'.

There were occasions when the authorities overplayed their hand and caused this manipulative practice to become the subject of public debate but these were rare. When Asquith's Coalition Government introduced Regulation 27 (a) imposing press silence on the reporting of secret sessions of Parliament, Dalziel, proprietor of Reynolds News and M. P. for Brixton, objected in the House of Commons to such a high handed approach at a time when 'the Press has been

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60. P.R.O. HO 139/9/A368/Part 1.

61. War Office Memorandum to the Press, 27th April 1916. P.R.O. HO 139/40.

loyal and partiotic...and scarcely any request that the Government has made has ever been refused. Such requests are made daily as my Right Hon. Friend (Herbert Samuel, Liberal Home Secretary) knows. Every week an urgent and important request is made on behalf of the Government that papers should not comment on this and that they should avoid discussion of that'.[62] Referring to the Irish rebellion in Dublin, currently occupying the Government's attention, Dalziel went on : 'Although it has been denied in this House, it is true that only last week the Press of London were asked not to comment on the Irish situation and after that restriction was withdrawn they were asked not to publish any facts without the approval of my Right Hon. Friend (Samuel)'-[63] which goes far to explain the muted and patriotic coverage of the Irish troubles by Fleet Street papers.

A more sustained and damaging attack upon the D Notice system was made, again by politicians rather than journalists, in 1917 when the Press Bureau issued on 16th February 1917 a memorandum, clearly emanating from the War Office, which argued that it was becoming clear that Germany would make a big push for victory in 1917 and that the Allies must be prepared for a long struggle. The role suggested for the press was 'not to give the impression that ultimate victory depends upon the result of operations during the coming summer' but in order to obtain 'a complete victory' rather than 'an inconclusive peace' the press should assist in preparing the nation 'for a prolongation of the war through next winter'.[64]

This somewhat crude attempt at manipulating editorial comment was too much for some editors to stomach. The notice was leaked, prominent members of the Union for Democratic Control made speeches

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62. House of Commons Debates, 5th Series, 8th May 1916, Col. 381.
63. ibid.
64. P.R.O. HO 139/23/A911/Part 3/31.

attacking what they regarded as a serious encroachment upon the freedom of the press and the matter of D Notices was again raised in the House of Commons. Laurence Ginnell, the Irish Nationalist member for North Meath wanted to know by whose authority the Notices were issued[65] and Mr Outhwaite, M.P. for Hanley unsuccessfully demanded that all copies of D Notices be placed in the House of Commons Library.[66] But it was Dillon, Irish Nationalist leader who made the sharpest attack complaining on 27th March 1971 that '...the practice of issuing long statements of precautions and instructions.... directing the Press what view they are to cultivate in the minds of the public...has now become a regular and consistent practice. Long documents are sent out asserting that it is extremely desirable that certain views should be discouraged and others encouraged and this brings the Press down to the level of the reptile Press which used to be controlled by Prince Bismarck'.[67]

There were few editors prepared to classify themselves as 'reptiles' in support of Dillon's criticisms and fewer still prepared to acknowledge even the existence of such Notices. One of the few was Massingham, editor of The Nation but it was not until 1917 that he openly expressed his disgust with a system which in his view sought 'to establish a super-editorship of the Press, so as to mould its will and intelligence into agreement with the official pattern'. (The Nation, 14th April 1917). Most editors, while remaining consistently critical of the Bureau and the censorship in public, cooperated with the Bureau in private and observed most its instructions and requests. While The Manchester Guardian frequently abused the Bureau in its leader columns as being an undemocratic and 'Prussian-like' institution, its editor. C.P. Scott, wrote to the Bureau in 1916 urging a greater restriction on the number of newspapers receiving the D Notices on the grounds that some newspapers were 'irresponsible' in observing confidential information.[68] Another vociferous critic of the Bureau's alleged

65. House of Commons Debates, 5th Series, 5th March 1917, Cols. 27-8.

66. House of Commons Debates, 5th Series, 23rd April 1917, Col. 2034.

67. House of Commons Debates, 5th Series, 27th March 1917, Col.297.

68. C.P. Scott to Sir Edward Cook, 9th April 1916, P.R.O. HO 139/18/A718/Part 1/23.

unfairness and dictatorial methods, H.A. Gwynne, editor of the Morning Post wrote to Cook on the 10th of April 1916 that '...while you should continue to send instructions to people in whom you have full trust (i.e. H.A. Gwynne) you should send to the other papers mere orders, telling them to do this or not to do that'.[69] Censorship, like self sacrifice, is always good for someone else. Constantly voicing its objections when the censorship affected what it regarded as its members' critical or commercial interests, the N.P.A. nevertheless circularised its members with notices urging strict observation of the Bureau's notices and frequently it drew the Bureau's attention to newspapers that it considered were ignoring instructions or behaving in what its secretary Sir George Riddell regarded as an unpatriotic manner.[70] Like Scott and Gwynne, the N.P.A. members' calls for more information and facts about the war in the name of democracy were compromised by a resolution like that of 19th January 1916 calling on the Bureau 'in the interests of secrecy (to observe) greater caution...in drafting and transmitting their instructions'.[71]

Far from criticizing the D Notices, those who received them clearly wished to remain members of 'the club' and those journals which had not at first been included on Robbins's lists ,far from attacking the system as undemocratic or manipulative, were for ever pleading with the Bureau to join. In requesting to be sent the Notices, Fred. W. Dimbleby, proprietor of The Richmond and Twickenham Times told the Bureau on 19th July 1915 that he had seen 'flagrant breaches of the rules, (D.O.R.A. Regulations) committed, of course, through ignorance of the official desires...the only safe way is to give all newspapers a guiding hand. We are all anxious to give loyal assistance...'[72] The editor of Town Topics in making his plea to be added to the list, assured the Bureau on 13th of October ,1916 that 'We have no desire to print anything which would be in the slightest way embarrassing to the authorities'.[73]

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69. Gwynne to Cook, 10th April 1916, P.R.O. HO 139/18/A718/Part1/23.

70. On the 15th of October 1915 Riddell sent the Bureau a list of newspapers in the Glasgow area which he considered were in breach of the D Notice instructions. P.R.O. HO 139/10/12.

71. ibid.

72. P.R.O. HO 139/19/A724/Part 1/12.

73. P.R.O. HO 139/19/A724/Part 4/6.

Public vilification of the censorship and private cooperation and observation of its instructions are an indication of how far the ethical standards of the journalistic profession plunged during the war. There were journalists prepared to go much further in their degree of cooperation with the authorities. Ellis T. Powell, editor of the Financial News wrote to Cook on 11th February 1916 pointing out that 'it has often occurred to me that some very useful press work could be done by the occasional publication of misleading information in the newspapers'.[74] Powell's idea was that false information contained in such items as market reports would be picked up by German spies or read in Germany and he urged the formation of a 'small and secret'[75] government committee to supervise the insertions. Swettenham replied that 'this office (Press Bureau) has always held that we have hitherto neglected (such) a valuable weapon against the enemy'.[76] and on 21st March 1916 he asked Powell to place an article in the Financial News emphasising the weakness of the German financial situation and drawing special attention to the steady decline in the value of the mark 'in the hope of influencing them (neutral countries) not to subscribe to the German loan should they have any intention'.[77]

Powell duly published such an article and as Cook told the Foreign Office on 28th March 1916 '(Powell) now inserts nearly every day some article attacking German credit'.[78] This cooperative state of affairs continued until October 1916 when Powell, perhaps bored with the tedium of writing articles on German finance, published a piece for neutral consumption alleging that an integral part of any peace settlement imposed by a victorious Germany would include the 'resettlement of one million of the best and healthiest (females)...on human stud farms in Germany there to breed new populations with German officers and public officials as promiscuous fathers' (Financial News, 7th October 1916).

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74. P.R.O. HO 139/29/A1067/6.
75. ibid.
76. Swettenham to Powell, 18th February 1916, ibid.
77. ibid.
78. Cook to H.H. Montgomery, Foreign Office, 28th March 1916, ibid.

Swettenham was told by Powell that he had no written source for such allegations which was as Swettenham told him on 20th October 1916 'very unfortunate'[79] as German propaganda was using the piece as a typical example of scurrilous and false British news reporting. Powell's excesses appeared to have discouraged the Bureau from making wider use of what the Directors, in their memorandum to the War Cabinet in 1917 considered to be the eagerness of 'many influential editors...to give assistance, by hint and speculations (which) might have been of great value in misleading the enemy'.[80] It was not until the Second World War under the more subtle guidance of philosophers like Richard Crossman that such crude methods were refined to make Britain the master practitioner in the vile art of black propaganda.

Writing about American press censorship during the Second World War, Robert E. Summers describes how 'the success of the present (1942) censorship program depends largely upon the cooperation exhibited by newspapers and radio stations. If they refuse to cooperate with ...the office of the Censor even the most stringent regulations would be little more than useless'.[81] This was essentially the case with British press censorship during the First World War. The cornerstone of the British system was the private and confidential D Notices which most editors took seriously and which appear to have been an efficient method of home propaganda and press control, guiding and shaping both the content and presentation of the war news. The full and immediate impact of defeats and setbacks like the loss of the 'Audacious', the merchant shipping losses or the fall of Kut-al-Amara were to some extent neutralized by bland or soothing reports inspired by official 'requests' which it can be argued 'lulled the country into a passive confidence in the military authorities'.[82]

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79. Swettenham to Powell, P.R.O. HO139/29/A1067/6.

80. 'The Official Press Bureau', op. cit., p.8. Sir Edward Cook in his book on the war-time press censorship makes it clear that not all journalists were prepared to bend their ethical standards to suit the times. Cook recalls how he suggested to an 'important military writer (probably Repington) that he should put in false information ...as his articles were read by (German) Intelligence Divisions but he said "to commit myself to predictions which turned out to be wrong would be to do injury to my paper and to my reputation"!' Cook, op.cit., p.102.

81. Summers, op. cit.,(1942) p.151.

82. Peter Fraser, Lord Esher: the myth and the man (London,Hart-Davi s, 1973) p.372.

But as we have observed not all editors and journalists were as 'cooperative' as Fred. W. Dimbleby and Ellis T. Powell and the instructions and requests issued through the Bureau were by no means universally obeyed, especially in the provinces. The Press Bureau, particularly during Buckmaster's period as Director, sought to bring recalcitrants to heel by making the flouting of a Press Bureau Notice a breach of the D.O.R.A. Regulations - in other words the Bureau sought more power as a censorship authority. The story of how it went about this, bringing it as it did into headlong collision with the Service departments and sections of the press and Parliament and which inevitably left the Bureau with the reputation as a repressive institution will be the subject of Chapter V.

CHAPTER V

A Free Press in Chains?

'...the British Press was completely muzzled by a rigorous government censorship...' Richard S. Lambert, Propaganda (London, Nelson & Co., 1938) P. 26.

One of the most persistent myths about the First World War press censorship in Britain has been that it was '....severe, impossibly severe'[1] and that it was so 'rigorous (that it) forbade all military news'.[2] Repington, military correspondent of The Times for most of the war, began it all with repeated allegations in his memoirs published in 1920 that 'a Censorship is the master of the Press which is practically powerless'[3] - a totally false impression of the relationship between the press and the censorship authorities. Although the law affecting the press appeared severe it was in the main leniently administered, so much so that the Press Bureau, frustrated by the departments' reluctance to act against newspapers which failed to observe the D Notices, sought to make the instructions legally binding. But the Bureau's attempts (there were several) to gain more power and independence were soundly rebuffed by the War Office anxious both to retain the goodwill and cooperation of the press in the voluntary censorship scheme and wary of taking on a powerful Parliamentary lobby ever ready to rally to the cause of press freedom. Far from 'mastering' the press, the censorship in no way interfered with the right of newspapers to express their opinions and criticisms of the conduct of the war nor did it prevent journalists, Repington in particular, from publishing their scoops. Towards the end of the war the disparity of treatment between the large circulation newspapers and the socialist and pacifist press became sharply pronounced but the minority press was never crushed into silence while some of the socialist newspapers enjoyed unofficial ministerial protection.

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1. Michael Wynn Jones, A Newspaper History of the World (London, David & Charles, 1974) p.78.
2. A.J.P. Taylor, The First World War, An Illustrated History, (London, Penguin Books, 1966) p.56.
3. Lt. Colonel Charles à Court Repington, The First World War, Vol.II (London, Constable & Co. Ltd, 1920) p.68.

As we have seen in Chapter II (p.39) the bedrock of law upon which the censorship operated was the Defence of the Realm Acts (D.O.R.A.) of August and November, 1914 together with their attendant regulations. Under these the competent military authorities (C.M.A's) could on their own authority bring a newspaper or journalist before a court martial if it was considered that a breach of the regulations had occurred or was about to occur. In practise it seems that C.M.A.'s were instructed to consult the Service departments before proceeding and from the earliest months of the war the Service departments took a generally lenient interpretation of the D.O.R.A. Regulations.[4] As McKenna, when Home Secretary, said in November 1914, although the Regulations had been in existence for three months 'there has not been a single court martial under it...the power is there but it has never been exercised'.[5]

As far as the Regulations and the Press Bureau were concerned, press censorship remained an essentially voluntary undertaking. The Bureau had no legal status and its instructions were not binding on the press. As Buckmaster wrote to H.A. Gwynne, editor of the Morning Post '..... I do not think there is any power for me to compel newspapers to submit their matter here but if a newspaper did not ...and a breach of the regulations occurred there would be no defence whatever to proceedings that might be instituted against it'.[6] He went on to outline a defence often used by the Bureau throughout the war, that far from being a repressive ogre intent on mastering the press 'this office exists for the purpose of affording them protection against the results of disobedience...to the Regulations'.[7]

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4. Harry Lawson, later Lord Burnham, Managing Proprietor of the Daily Telegraph and a member of the Joint Committee referred in a Commons debate to 'an undertaking...given by the War Office that no prosecutions...before a Court-Martial should be undertaken except with the assent of those in high authority who were able to judge the gravity of the offence'. House of Commons Debates, 5th Series, 24th February 1915, Col. 300.
5. House of Commons Debates, 5th Series, 23rd November 1914, Col. 915.
6. Buckmaster to Gwynne, 27th October 1914, P.R.O. HO 139/14/A531/Part 1.
7. ibid.

The Press Bureau was not a Government Department and its legal and administrative position was situated like Mohamed's tomb, in a place by itself. It was, in the words of an internal memorandum prepared for Buckmaster in November 1914 'a delegate or agent for the other Government departments (Admiralty and War Office)'.[8]

The Bureau had not been established by Act of Parliament and it had no one in Parliament or Government solely responsible for defending its interests. Because of this confused status, its spokesmen either claimed far more authority and power for it than it possessed either by law or in practice or they denied that it had any at all. Depending on the political needs of the moment Smith, Buckmaster, and Home Secretaries - McKenna, Simon, Samuel and Cave - all made statements which either suggested that the censorship was a powerful force which would be used ruthlessly against the enemies of the state or that the Bureau was a mere cypher of the Service and other Government Departments. At one moment Buckmaster referring to Press attacks on Lord Haldane was suggesting that the Bureau would suppress all forms of political criticism,[9] at another that 'It is they (the Service departments) and not I who decide...'.[10] As Mr Lynch the Nationalist M.P. for West Clare pointed out, when Buckmaster was describing how important the Press Bureau's work was 'in an office not known or sanctioned or approved by Parliament 'he seemed to have exercised great powers of distinction' but in defence of the Bureau's actual record 'he seems to recede into an almost mythical character'.[11] It was the same behind the scenes. While claiming to editors that the Bureau existed for their protection, Buckmaster and his succcssors sought every opportunity to prosecute newspapers guilty of breaches of the Regulations in an attempt to increase the Bureau's power and authority over the press.

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8. Memorandum on the constitutional aspects of the Press Bureau, by R.P.H. Hills, 9th November 1914. P.R.O. HO 139/17/A682/Part 1.
9. House of Lords Debates, 5th Series, 3rd November 1915, Col 157.
10. House of Commons Debates, 5th Series, 8th February, 1915, Col 351.
11. ibid., Col. 378.

A major test of any authority is how much power it has to impose its wishes upon those subject to it. In the case of the Press Bureau, it could not independently institute proceedings against newspapers. It could only recommend such action to the Service departments and Home Office and it was this divided authority which was administratively the major stumbling block to any easy imposition of a repressive censorship policy. For example Buckmaster considered that an item in the South Wales Daily News about troop movements on the 12th of Feburary 1915 was in clear breach of Regulation 18 and Press Bureau instructions about the mentioning of the names of regiments and he urged the War Office to prosecute. When A.P. Higham, editor of the Cambria Daily Leader who had first brought the matter to the attention of the Bureau in that spirit of comradeship so common amongst rival newspapers, wrote to Buckmaster on 11th March asking what progress the case was making and 'whether your communications are intended to be taken seriously or whether we are all at liberty to regard them as a mere amusement on the part of the officers of your department',[12] Buckmaster was forced to seek a decision from the War Office. Brade replied on 15th March that the War Office considered the South Wales Daily News 'too insignificant'to launch a prosecution against and Buckmaster was obliged to agree that it was now 'too late to take isolated action against the South Wales Daily News'[13] He was left to use the only weapon in his armoury, the threatening letter, telling the editor of the South Wales Daily News that 'I trust you will abide in future by the instructions... if not the military authorities will act'.[14]

Early that same month, Buckmaster sent six cases to Sir Graham Greene, Permanent Secretary of the Admiralty, involving breaches of the Regulations concerning cross channel ferries and urging upon Greene the need of speed if prosecutions were to be launched. Greene replied on 22nd March that the Admiralty saw no reason to prosecute in five of the cases and in the sixth, although the Director of Public Prosecutions believed there was a case, the proprietor of the paper,

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12. P.R.O. HO 139/14/A568/3. The case had been sent to the War Office on 13th February.
13. ibid. Buckmaster to Brade, 16th March 1915.
14. ibid.

Lord Montagu of Beaulieu had been of assistance to the Director of the Air Department at the Admiralty and therefore 'it was finally agreed the D.P.P. should write a letter to him..'[15] As Buckmaster told Brade over a similar delay involving a possible prosecution of The Times:'Delay beyond a few days will, in my opinion, prejudice and probably ruin almost any case'.[16]

To a lawyer of Buckmaster's calibre this situation was both frustrating and demeaning and in early 1915 he made strenuous efforts to get it changed. Buckmaster sought power for the Bureau to institute proceedings against newspapers on its own authority particularly in those cases where as we have seen, delays and Service department reluctance let the newspapers off the hook. As he wrote to McKenna, the Home Secretary, seeking his support, 'It is, I assure you, no personal feeling but it is our united and confirmed conviction that we cannot protect our troops as we wish to protect them unless we have the power to punish as well as to threaten the press'.[17]

It was Brade of the War Office, far more in tune with press attitudes than most of his Whitehall colleagues including those at the Press Bureau, who firmly squashed this idea. Writing to Sir Edward Troup, Permanent Secretary at the Home Office,Brade stated bluntly that Buckmaster's plan 'seems to me quite unworkable. I have discussed it with one or two press friends[18] and they would not tolerate for a moment being placed in a position of a man who knows that, though the military have aquitted him, he may be subject to a prosecution started by someone else...Buckmaster has it at the back of his head that the reasons why we have not prosecuted have been either that we

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15. Greene to Buckmaster, 22nd March 1915, P.R.O. HO139/22/A872/15 .

16. Buckmaster to Brade, 16th March 1915 P.R.O. HO 139/5/A127.

17. Buckmaster to McKenna, 28th February 1915. P.R.O. HO 139/21/A798/ Part 1/16.

18. Brade was in regular personal contact with Riddell of the N.P.A. and with editors like R.D. Blumenfeld of the Daily Express , and his future proprietor, Max Beaverbrook. When Blumenfeld wrote to him complaining of an officious letter he had received from the Bureau, Brade made his low opinion of the Bureau plain enough; 'I am afraid the Press Bureau misunderstand their functions. This is of course between ourselves'. Brade to Blumenfeld 6th December 1914.Blumenfeld Papers, PB.16,House of Lords Record Office. Beaverbrook said of Brade: 'He was my friend ..a good companion and much sought after in political circles' . Lord Beaverbrook Men and Power (London,Collins & Co., 1956) p.44.

are afraid of the offender or that we are not sufficiently blood thirsty. I am quite certain that if the thing were handed over to him, there would speedily be a mutiny and the Press Bureau would be closed'.[19] Brade made clear that 'the Admiralty are strongly opposed to the change'[20] and with such formidable opposition it is therefore not surprising to discover the somewhat forlorn note at the end of this file : 'This draft made no progress'.[21] Buckmaster's claim to the title of protector of the press against the ravages of martial law ring a little hollow after this story.

But this was not to be the end of the Press Bureau's attempts to get more power or Brade's successful efforts at frustrating them. In the Autumn of 1915, the Bureau obtained the Home Secretary, Sir John Simon's support for a draft change in the Regulations which would, in effect, have given the Bureau departmental status. Newspapers regularly complained to the Bureau about other newspapers who were not observing the D Notices and under the draft proposals, disobedience of the instructions would become an offence in itself. 'What we want', wrote Swettenham to Simon, 'is instant prosecution. One successful case would have a very good effect'.[22] Brade opposed this proposal again arguing that the Bureau appeared to be obsessed with its own status and the need to obtain convictions whereas as he wrote to Swettenham on 23rd of October '...the real obstacle is irremovable. It arises from a genuine mistake or at the most carelessness and somewhere or other in the chain of authorities through which the charge has to pass before conviction is secured you are bound to find someone who will admit that consideration and refuse to play up to a penal result'.[23] News of the Bureau's plans was leaked to Riddell of the N.P.A.[24] and with the prospect of a press

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19. Brade to Troup, 11th March 1915. P.R.O. HO 45/11007/271672/33.
20. ibid.
21. ibid.
22. Swettenham to Simon, 12th November 1915, P.R.O. HO 139/17/A682/Part1/6.
23. Brade to Swettenham, P.R.O. WO 32/4893.
24. Swettenham appears to have believed that Brade was responsible for this (Letter to Brade, 28th October 1915, ibid) although Brade denied it on the margin of Swettenham's letter.

and Parliamentary row, they were abandoned. In the words of Major General Callwell, D.M.O. : 'Parliament will not like to give such powers unless the need can be made out very clearly'.[25]

Brade had been particularly shocked to discover from Buckmaster, now Lord Chancellor that 'it had been the intention to issue the new Regulation making it an offence to disobey Press Bureau instructions and giving the Press Bureau power to prosecute without any reference to the Press - in fact to impose it upon them'[26] which, as Brade told General Murray at the time Chief of the Imperial General Staff, was not the way to handle the press : 'the policy we have pursued with the Press is one of persuasion and looking to the general results I believe that that policy has paid...whenever we have omitted to take the newspaper interests with us beforehand any protests they have subsequently made have been effective'.[27] The War Office under Brade's influence tended to show far more appreciation of press attitudes and problems than did the Admiralty or indeed the Press Bureau and on the rare occasions when it acted against a newspaper it far preferred the imposition of an export ban on circulation than dragging a paper through the courts.

But the Press Bureau continued throughout the war to seek ways of punishing the few newspapers who blatantly ignored an instruction. When The Star on 28th of May 1917 revealed that Balfour, Foreign Secretary, was in Canada, despite a D Notice (D564) of 25th May 1917 requesting the press to maintain silence on his movements, the Press Bureau threatened to withdraw its news service from it. What upset the Bureau in particular was that not only had The Star ignored its instructions but it had openly boasted that it had done so in the interests of free speech. ('What the penalty will be we shudder to contemplate,' The Star, 28th May 1917). The N.P.A. concerned at what it recognised

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25. Callwell to Murray, C.I.G.S., U/D, P.R.O. WO 32/4893.
26. Brade minute to Murray, C.I.G.S., 22nd October 1915, ibid.
27. Brade to Murray, 1st October 1915, ibid.

as a major threat to any newspaper's competitiveness if deprived of the official news bulletins, immediately lodged an effective protest in defence, as Riddell wrote to Sir Edward Cook, of the 'right of the Press to comment upon and criticize prohibitions which may from time to time be used by the authorities. It is, of course impossible to exercise that right without referring inferentially to the D Notice which it is desired to impugn'[28] (not that many newspapers appear to have had any such desire). The threat to The Star was withdrawn. Faced with the powerful opposition of the N.P.A. which in many areas of press activity cooperated fully with the Bureau and with the prospect of a press campaign on the issue looming on the horizon the Bureau had been forced to abandon this attempt at imposing by administrative order the authority for its instructions which they lacked in law.

There were other administrative problems which in effect limited the scope for repressive measures against the press which have been touched on above. When the Bureau and other Government departments sent cases to the Service departments with the recommendation to prosecute, these were regularly sent on to the Law Officers of the Crown for consideration. After usually lengthy deliberation, the officers tended to advise that while a prosecution might succeed in court, the attendant publicity thus incurred defeated the principal purpose. Sir Ernley Blackwell, a senior official at the Home Office neatly summarised this view when explaining to the Foreign Office the reasons why no action had been taken against The Bradford Pioneer for an article on 17th November 1916 considered by the Foreign Office to be both pacifist and pro-German:[29] '..prosecutions... would have to be numerous if a policy of repression was once decided upon (and)

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28. Riddell to Cook, 31st May 1917, P.R.O. HO139/6/A190/29.

29. The Foreign Office had kept a file of what the Assistant Under Secretary of State, Lord Newton described as 'highly objectionable and pernicious' material published in the Labour Leader which he sent on to Home Office with Sir Edward Grey's comments that 'he (Grey) considers these articles to be unpatriotic and harmful to this country' although he is 'doubtful whether they afford sufficiently definite ground for suppression or prosecution of the paper'. Newton to the Home Office, 28th November 1916. P.R.O. HO 45/10786/297549/50. Grey had sought the Home Secretary, Herbert Samuels's opinion as to the viability of prosecution.

would do more harm than good. They would have the effect of advertising the speeches and publications which are now, for the most part left in obscurity : they would probably not succeed in preventing the repetition of the offences and they would be likely to give rise to an agitation damaging to our cause in America and elsewhere based upon the charge that His Majesty's Government was using the power of the executive to prevent freedom of speech and to conceal important facts from the nation'.[30]

The Law Officers were also in touch with the opinion of magistrates likely to hear such cases who inclined to take the view that newspapers were in the main patriotic and that prosecutions against them represented bureaucratic pettiness. The Daily Mirror on 8th January 1917 published a particularly grotesque photograph of blind students at St. Dunstans being taught with the aid of a skeleton with a caption underneath : 'Twelve months ago this skeleton was a living German'. The story proved to be false but was picked up and used by the German press and German propaganda. Despite a printed apology in the Daily Mirror the Press Bureau sought a prosecution. The Director of Public Prosections sent the papers to the Attorney General who after consultation with the Clerk to the magistrates at the Guildhall, believed that no prosecution would be possible.[31] There was also in many cases the problem of bringing officers back from France and other theatres of war to testify that a particular item had been of use to the enemy as Buckmaster pointed out to the House of Commons in February 1915[32] (and which was a factor in the decision not to seize the printing plant of the Morning Post in February 1918 as we shall discuss later in this chapter).

Administratively then there were great difficulties in any attempt to adopt a repressive press policy. There were even greater difficulties

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30. Sir Ernley Blackwell to Foreign Office, 7th December 1917 P.R.O. HO. 45/10786/297549/50.

31. P.R.O. HO. 139/13/A503/25.

32. House of Commons Debates, 5th Series. 8th February 1915,Col. 355.

in meeting the howl of Parliamentary and press opposition whenever such action took place - an oppositi on often disparate and inconsistent. When the Liberal Government, in November 1914 included a clause in the Defence of the Realm (Consolidation) Act which sought 'to prevent the spread of reports likely to cause disaffection or alarm...'[33] it was the Unionist M.P. Lord Hugh Cecil who led the opposition to what Cecil described as these 'extremely wide powers (which) 'practically enable the Government to suppress any reports of any kind of which they disapprove'.[34]

What of the word 'alarm'? asked Cecil. 'Someone might report a reverse or misfortune and from the mere fact that it was likely to cause alarm would be liable to be brought before a court martial... such regulations might be used to keep the people in the dark unnecessarily as to the events of the war (and) nothing would be more disastrous to the morale of the people of this country'.[35] The Government accepted an amendment proposed by Cecil which made it an offence to spread 'false reports' and thus greatly narrowed the scope ot offences, much to the benefit of the press. Under this November Consolidation Act all offences were to be tried by Court Martial[36] and the death penalty was to be extended to all offenders, not just enemy subjects. This major extension of executive power met with substantial opposition in the House of Lords particularly from eminent Law Lords such as the Earl of Halsbury who saw the measure as 'the sweeping away of generations of personal liberty'.[37] As a result of persistent pressure from the House of Lords, the Government introduced an amendment to the November Bill in February, 1915 which gave a choice to anyone charged under the D.O.R.A. Regulations of a trial by Court Martial or trial by jury.[38]

Several newspapers were suppressed during the war for alleged breaches of the regulations but the row which quickly ensued in Parliament and in the country ensured that their disappearance from the newsstands was of very short duration. The Globe, a small

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33. Public General Statutes, 4 & 5 Geo 5 (c).
34. House of Commons Debates, 23rd November 1914, Col. 910.
35. ibid.
36. Public General Statutes, 4 & 5 Geo 5.
37. House of Lords Debates, 5th Series, 27th November 1914, Col. 207.
38. Public General Statutes, 5 Geo 5.

and virulently jingo, anti-Liberal newspaper upset Asquith and Lloyd George's plans for removing Kitchener by spreading the rumour that Kitchener had resigned and that Haldane was about to take his place at the War Office, a story it continued to run despite Press Bureau protests and public denials[39]. It was at a time when right wing jingo attacks in papers like The Globe, John Bull and the Northcliffe's Daily Mail and Evening News had reached their zenith and Asquith, having already made a forthright attack on this section of the press in a speech at the Mansion House and now frustrated in his plans to keep Kitchener in the East, ordered action. A hastily gathered conference at the Home Office on 6th November 1915 of the senior Law Officers under Simon's chairmanship, faced with the failure of the courts either to convict in press cases or to impose heavy sentences in the case of conviction, decided on a new tactic against The Globe - suppression of the newspaper by use of Regulation 51 which authorised the raiding of The Globe's premises in the Strand and the seizure of its plant and machinery.[40]

The Unionist press greeted the event with indifference but Liberal journals expressed the utmost satisfaction, viewing it as the finest thing that could have happened to The Globe and expressing disappointment that the government had not acted sooner. 'The Government', wrote the Daily News on 8th November 1915, 'has been extraordinarily tolerant of the outrageous attacks with which it has been assailed by a little knot of London papers. The effect of the tolerance has been to convince the offenders that they were immune from any kind of punishment...the

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39. D 304 of 4th November 1915 had 'urgently requested' the press, 'to refrain from any reference to the movements of Lord Kitchener until further notice,' P.R.O. HO 45/303412/2. Despite a Press Bureau statement on the 5th of November that 'there is no truth in the statement that Lord Kitchener has resigned' (ibid), The Globe persisted with the story on the 6th of November with the headlines 'The truth about Lord Kitchener/...His Resignation Tendered' with placards directed at the core of their concern : 'Lord/Haldane?/ God Forbid'.

40. P.R.O. HO 45/303412/3.

illusion had been dispelled...one may hope that ...it is an indication that the Government intend to tolerate no longer the form of journalism which under pretext of a clamour for strong government goes far to make any government impossible...'.

But there were few plaudits for the action in the House of Commons where the Government was accused of having acted unfairly against The Globe when other newspapers, particularly those owned by Lord Northcliffe, had run much the same story but had not been touched.[41] 'The Government', said Mr. Hogge,Liberal M.P. for Edinburgh East, 'is afraid to apply its powers impartially'.[42] Other M.P.'s like Mr. Pringle,Liberal (North West Lanarkshire) went to the heart of the matter and accused the Government of having suppressed The Globe not because of its statement that Kitchener was about to retire but because 'it was advocating his permanent retention.'[43] The Government were forced to concede an emergency debate on the issue on the 11th of November 1915 in which Asquith's defence that to have allowed The Globe to go on repeating the story would have done 'the greatest injury to this country in the eyes of the world'[44] and Simon's lame defence that the Evening News which had carried the same story had not been suppressed because it had reported the story 'in a future form'[45] found little support in the Commons and within a week, after a suitably abject public apology from the proprietors, The Globe was back on Fleet Street albeit with a new editor, but as rabidly jingo and bitter in its attacks upon 'the policitians' as before.

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41. Northcliffe's Evening News told its readers on the 6th of November that 'we are in a position to state that despite all official denials, the public may take it for granted that Lord Kitchener will not return to the War Office'.
42. House of Commons Debates, 5th Series, 8th November 1915,Col.1398 .
43. ibid., Col. 1406.
44. House of Commons Debates, 5th Series, 11th November 1915, Col. 1403.
45. ibid., Col. 1421.

Industrial trouble on Clydeside quickly brought Lloyd George (described by Forward on 1st January 1916 as 'the best paid Munitions worker in Britain') to Glasgow over the Christmas of 1915 to address a series of meetings in an attempt to pacify the situation and in particular to persuade the unions to suspend pre-war union regulations and accept the principle of dilution of labour. The Vanguard came out firmly against such a proposal : 'We warn the workers that Lloyd George is coming to the Clyde to hoodwink them into accepting the introduction of unskilled men and women; that this means weakening the unions and their ultimate paralysis' (1st January 1916). This together with Forward's account of the failure, on Christmas Day 1915 of the Welsh wizard's charm and rhetoric to win over a hostile audience of Glasgow engineers was too much for Lloyd George's ego to bear. Swift action was taken and machinery was seized from the Civic Press which printed both papers on the grounds that both were spreading false stories likely to cause disaffection in breach of Regulation 27.

Again it was persistent Parliamentary and political pressure upon the Government rather than agitation in the press, which forced a debate in the Commons on the action and the eventual reappearance of the newspapers. Lloyd George defended the suppressions with that blend of fact, fiction and demagogy that characterised so many of his Parliamentary performances. Forward,so he argued, had for months past transgressed the Regulations by sneering at the monarchy and by describing the war as a capitalist war thus discouraging recruiting. Thumping the patriotic drum for all it was worth,Lloyd George advised his critics 'instead of championing those who by their action are doing their best to champion the King's enemies, they should help to sweep away hindrances to the victory of our national land'.[46] Conveniently ignoring the charge that once again small newspapers were acted against whereas large circulation papers like Northcliffe's Weekly Dispatch could go on publishing bitter attacks upon the competency of Lord Kitchener, Lloyd George could not resist a

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46. House of Commons Debates, 5th Series, 10th January 1916, Col. 1415.

a neat thrust at the inconsistency of newspapers like Forward which objected most strongly to the executive action brought against them but who had declared at the time of The Globe's suppression : 'We weep no tears for the fall of The Globe. We laugh at the fiery slosh penned about freedom of the Press...'[47]

Continuous Parliamentary pressure, particularly from Labour members led by George Barnes, led to the return of the printing machinery at the beginning of February 1916, the editor of Forward having, after an interview with Lloyd George, signed an undertaking not to prejudice military interests or the safety of the country which the editor found 'an easy condition...as we had never so offended before' (Forward, 5th February 1916). While it was not indifferent to the treatment it had received - 'we now know the power of the Executive under D.O.R.A.,(Forward, 5th February 1916) - it was by no means cowed into submission as future editions were to prove. Its first editorial after the suppression contained a vigorous attack on Lloyd George's version of the recent events.

The intervention of Barnes in this case foreshadowed the role played by Arthur Henderson in preventing,albeit with the utmost reluctance, the prosecution of the Labour Leader and The Tribunal in January 1917. The Home Office, still smarting from the failure to achieve a conviction against the Labour Leader in Salford in 1915, had continued to monitor its contents and that of The Tribunal. By January 1917 they had collected a file of fifteen extracts which were considered to be clear breaches of Regulation 27 and Lloyd George as Prime Minister was asked to authorize action against the two papers.[48]Lloyd George instantly recognizing the political implications within the labour movement of such an action asked Henderson, the first member of the Labour Party to reach Cabinet rank, for his opinion.

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47. Cited by Lloyd George,House of Commons Debates,5th Series,10 January 191 Col.1413.

48. Articles which the Home Office considered 'endangered' the successful prosecution of the war included an attack on secret diplomacy (16th November 1916), a description of Fenner Brockway's court martial as a conscientious objector, an attack on The Times by E.D. Morel for helping to'to envenom European relations' (28th November 1916) and an attack on Arthur Henderson for a speech which the Leader considered to be 'kite flying' for industrial conscription (7th December 1916). P.R.O. HO45/10786/297549/51a.

Henderson replied that while he accepted 'without hesitation' their serious nature he doubted if their small circulation justified the executive action proposed and he added more significantly : 'I am convinced that were proceedings instituted the position of the Labour members of the Government would be rendered intolerable'.[49] particularly as at that moment he was about to attend a Labour conference at Manchester to defend the inclusion of the three Labour members in Lloyd George's national government. 'All argument' he went on, 'would be futile if, as would be the case, the attention of the conference were directed to the proceedings we had instituted against the papers'.[50]

Lloyd George took the point and anxious to retain the support of the majority of the Labour movement he for once became protector rather than a prosecutor of the press writing to Sir George Cave the Home Secretary that the proceedings against the two papers be abandoned : 'As you know the Labour Members of the Ministry have a very difficult corner to turn in the course of the next fortnight... I am reluctant to add to the difficulties of Mr. Henderson and his friends who have so loyally fought these extreme men...'[51] As we shall see later in this chapter when discussing the censorship of leaflets, these 'extreme men' while benefiting from Lloyd George's protection for the publication of their newspapers were not so fortunate so far as leaflets were concerned which were regularly seized and destroyed. Nor did Lloyd George's protective mantle provide adequate shelter for the smaller, less influential pacifist and minority papers such as The Call and the Workers Dreadnought which were subject to regular harrassment and suppression during the latter stages of the war.

Regulations 27(a) introduced on 22nd of April 1916 prohibited reports of the proceedings at secret sessions of Parliament and the unauthorized publication of Cabinet proceedings or documents[52]- all part of Asquith's

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49. Henderson to Lloyd George, 13th January 1917, P.R.O. HO. 45/10786/297549/51 a.
50. ibid.
51. Lloyd George to Sir George Cave, 15th January 1917,ibid.
52. Public General Statutes, 5 Geo 6.

elaborate attempts to conceal the deep divisions within the Liberal Party over the issue of conscription. Strong pressure from newspaper organizations, from leading provincial newspaper proprietors in particular and powerful Parliamentary pressure forced an undertaking from Herbert Samuel, the Home Secretary, that the initially repressive interpretation of the Regulation by chief constables would discontinue and that the Regulation would be administered leniently. The Press Bureau, for ever seeking to maximize its limited powers, had added a proviso to D 385 informing newspapers of the new Regulation, which stated that 'no speculation as to what took place or was said at the secret session of Parliament may be published',[53] and this considerably narrowed the options open to the press on how to cover this novel Parliamentary procedure.

The Home Office sent to all chief constables on 24th April 1916 a circular informing them of the new Regulation and of the forthcoming secret session on the 25th of April. The circular stressed how important it was that no report or description of the sittings other than the official communiqué should be published and went on to tell them that 'the Secretary of State will be glad if you will examine early on Wednesday morning (26th April) any newspaper published in your district and if any newspaper contains any reports or description of the Secret Sitting which is clearly a contravention you should take steps in accordance with Regulation 51 for the seizure of all copies of the paper and also of the printers' plant...'[54] As Sir Henry Dalziel, proprietor of Reynolds News complained in the House of Commons with a newspaperman's unfailing talent for exaggeration :
'within a few hours of the Regulation being issued a police constable called on every editor in London and throughout the country, asked to see the editor personally on behalf of the Government, warned him and read to him the Regulation, hoped he would realize the seriousness of it and explained that if any reference was made to the Cabinet, the paper would immediately be suppressed, plant seized and the editor himself in all probability would be arrested'. To which Samuel rejoined: 'It's the first I know about it'.[55]

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53. P.R.O. HO 45/10815/314696/1.
54. ibid.
55. House of Commons Debates, 5th Series, 8th May 1916, Col. 377.

Samuel's comment represented later Home Office views that chief constables had acted with excessive vigour and had ordered such visits to newspaper offices before the papers had been published which 'they had clearly no powers to do...'[56] The Press Bureau Notice, coupled with the visit of a policeman to newspaper offices, a new and alarming precedent, put the fear of God into many editors especially in the provinces which tended to have less to do with the Press Bureau and government departments than their Fleet Street contemporaries. The influential editor and proprietor of the Liverpool Daily Post and Mercury Sir Edward Russell wrote to Balfour the Foreign Secretary complaining of 'this new prerogative of the police...a most drastic innovation and one quite at variance from what everyone would desire to be the practice of the British Government'.[57]

A resolution of the N.P.A. delivered to Samuel personally by Riddell had made clear that the principal anxiety of the press was 'the terms of the second paragraph of Regulation 27 (about the reporting of Cabinet meetings) and to request the Home Secretary to take steps to make such amendments as will prevent the possibility of unjust and arbitrary action on the part of the military and police authorities.'[58] Although Dalziel's House of Commons motion requesting the government to amend the Regulation along the lines outlined by the N.P.A. was rejected and the Regulation remained in force for the duration of the war, Samuel did promise that the Government and the Home Office administration would be against 'any action with regard to the Press which would suppress the criticism of Ministers ...(and that) the new Regulation ...will certainly not be harshly or oppressively administered'.[59] The range and intensity of political intrigue and details of Cabinet meetings published in the press subsequent to the proclamation of the Regulation, particularly towards the end of 1916 at the time of Asquith's departure from office bear testimony to Samuel's undertaking and to the combined power of Parliament and the

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56. Home Office minute, Troup to Samuel, 26th June 1916, P.R.O. HO45/10815,op.cit.

57. Sir Edward Russell to A.J. Balfour, 20th June 1916, ibid.

58. N.P.A. Resolution, 28th April 1916, ibid.

59. House of Commons Debates, 5th Series, 8th May 1916, Cols. 422-3.

press to effectively oppose any executive action which sought to constrain the right of the press to report and comment on politics or the war. But the image of policemen visiting newspaper offices lingered on.

Perhaps the finest example of the power of this Parliament/Press lobby to fight off attempts at repressive action against the press was the manner in which modifications were forced on the Lloyd George Government's leaflet censorship in November and December 1917. Alarmed by the growth of pacifist literature in leaflet form which, although technically subject to the D.O.R.A. Regulations were rarely submitted to the Bureau for censorship, Sir George Cave for the Home Office obtained War Cabinet approval for an amendment (C) to Regulation 27, which made it unlawful for any person to publish a leaflet dealing with the continuance of the war or the conclusion of peace unless the contents had been approved by the Press Bureau and the name and address of the author and printer were printed on each copy.[60] Although this amendment did not directly affect newspapers many of them regarded the proposals as the thin edge of the wedge of restrictions which could easily be imposed on the press unless a stand was made against them.

'Considerable doubt 'was expressed at the War Cabinet about the 'efficacy and desirability' of the Press Bureau taking on such a job which could well lead to 'an almost unanimous outcry' in the press.[61] This duly occurred on 16th November 1917 following Cave's announcement and continued daily in the press and in Parliament until Cave agreed to modifications to Regulation 27 (c) on 10th December. The Star described the Regulation as a form of 'British Tsardom : to insist on censorship beforehand is to introduce the worst vices of the

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60. The Home Office suspected that one reason for the increase in this literature was the financial support given to pacifist organizations by businessmen anxious to renew trade with the Central Powers. Home Office Memorandum, 19th October 1917, P.R.O. Cab 23/4 W.C. 253/1.

61. War Cabinet minute, 15th November 1917. Cab 23/4 W.C.274/17. Brade as usual, in touch with press opinion, told Riddell that he expected 'strong opposition' from the newspapers. G.A.Riddell op. cit.,(1933) p. 290.

Russian Tsardom and it will not be long before it is extended to leading articles in newspapers' (16th November 1917). The doubts expressed at the War Cabinet about what in effect was a considerable extension of Press Bureau power was more forcibly voiced by the Liverpool Daily Post and Mercury which said on 28th November 1917 that the new Regulation '...makes any fool employed by the Press Bureau a judge above the law'.

The London correspondent of the Manchester Guardian, (L.T. Hobhouse) saw it as 'the first step towards the censorship of opinion and the logical extension of it is a censorship of opinion in the press...' a view re-inforced in the main leader column : 'if they (the government) are allowed to have their way, the turn of the platform and newspaper will come next'. (16th November 1917). These sentiments were backed by the Liberal and Labour press which argued like Philip Snowden in the Labour Leader that 'it is but one small step further to the application of a similar censorship to the newspapers'. The Labour press, in the light of the virulently anti-pacifist line taken by Northcliffe's papers, saw his influence behind the War Cabinet decision : 'we are more than ever bound, gagged and blindfolded' declared The Herald 'at the chariot wheels of the few politicians who at any moment may happen to be, by the good graces of Lord Northcliffe, in power' (5th December 1917).'There is',wrote the diarist of the Westminster Gazette, 'a widespread feeling that the Government have gone too far' (28th November 1917).

But not far or soon enough for right wing Unionist papers like the Morning Post which considered, under a leader column headed 'The Pacifist Poison', that 'too late rather than too soon the Government have decided to stand up to these (pacifist) mischief-makers'. The Morning Post reminded its readers that Liberal newspapers like the Daily News and Westminster Gazette who 'look upon the Home Secretary as little better than Hindenburg or Von Tirpitz' were not so long ago,when a Liberal Government was in power, 'clamouring to use the most drastic powers against anyone who ventured to suggest that all was not right with the conduct of the war' (14th December 1917). The Glasgow Herald whose London correspondent in a fine piece of 'objective' reporting on the

Liberal parliamentary campaign to get the Regulation withdrawn considered that 'Liberty has degenerated to unbridled licence and the country's war efforts are hindered by the circulation of pernicious 'literature' from pacifist and pro-German sources. It is time to stop this campaign'. (27th November 1917).

The Liberal and socialist press agitation was backed by direct action both in and out of Parliament. A delegation of trade union and Labour Party representatives saw Sir George Cave on the 5th of December led by Ramsay McDonald and expressed to him the fears of the organized labour movement that the new Regulation could easily be used against 'trade union activities and the things we are issuing from week to week and day to day'[62] Cave was reminded, like Lloyd George had been in 1916 that the trade unions 'have been doing valuable service in the country and that anything that causes them concern is worth the serious consideration of the Members of the Government'.[63] Pushed by the strong campaign in the Liberal press and by a House of Commons resolution signed by forty five Liberal M.P.'s which stated that the new Regulation, by introducing compulsion into censorship regulations for the first time, was : 'contrary to British liberty and unnecessary for national defence and security',[64] Herbert Samuel, on behalf of the former Liberal Cabinet, wrote to Cave urging him to remove the words 'submitted to and passed by' the Press Bureau in the new Regulation. 'These' , Samuel argued, 'oust the jurisdiction of the Court and for the first time confer upon the Executive powers of censorship in political matters which cannot be questioned at law'.[65]

It appears clear from the War Cabinet file that this letter in conjunction with the visit from a representative of the Labour Party and trade unions convinced Cave of the need to modify the Regulation and on the 7th of December he received Cabinet approval for a modification whereby publication of a leaflet was no longer dependent on approval by the Press Bureau.[66]

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62. Home Office memorandum of Trade Union and Labour Party delegation 5th December 1917, P.R.O. HO 45/10888/352206/92.
63. ibid.
64. ibid.
65. ibid.
66. P.R.O. War Cab 23/4, 15th November 1917.

Nevertheless all the leaflets had still to be submitted to the Bureau at least seventy two hours before publication. If the Bureau felt that a leaflet contravened the Regulations, then action could be taken to prevent its publication but with 'the ultimate decision resting with the courts'.[67] The modification offered no practical respite to pacifist organizations who wished to publish leaflets considered by the authorities to be 'mischievous' (leaflets for example advocating a negotiated peace). But the furore caused by the introduction of Regulation 27 (c) left the Government in no doubt that any extension of such repressive powers against the newspaper press was not viable. The somewhat ludicrous situation now arose, as Philip Snowden pointed out in the House of Commons, where a journalist could write a piece for a newspaper without having to submit it for censorship but would be forced to do so if it was to appear in leaflet form.[68] Lord Lansdowne's letter urging a negotiated peace upon the Government was published in the press but stopped by the Bureau when submitted for publication as a leaflet.

Several features of what up to now has been referred to as the 'Press/ Parliament' lobby are worth noting at this stage. It tended to be the same group of M.P.'s and peers who raised press matters in Parliament - in the Commons, Sir Henry Dalziel (Unionist, Brixton), Harry Lawson, later Lord Burnham (Unionist, Mile End), William Pringle (Liberal, N.W. Lanarkshire), James Hogge (Liberal, Edinburgh East), Robert Outhwaite (Liberal, Hanley), Sir Arthur Markham (Unionist, Mansfield), Laurence Ginnell (Irish Nationalist, N.W. Meath), Tim Healey (Irish Nationalist, N.E. Cork), Philip Snowden (I.L.P.,Blackburn),

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67. Sir George Cave, House of Commons Debates, 5th Series, 10th December 1917, Col. 857.

68. House of Commons Debates, 5th Series, 12th December 1917, Col.1294-5.

Ramsay MacDonald (I.L.P., Leicester), Sir George Toulmin (Liberal, Bury) and in the Lords well known figures like Viscounts Milner, Bryce and Selborne - all of whom had strong and direct links with the newspaper press, either as proprietors or journalists or in some cases, as both. There was no organizational ties between them nor could any group which had amongst its membership both the Hon. Harry Lawson, managing proprietor of the Daily Telegraph and Ramsay MacDonald, a director of the Labour Leader and a regular feature writer for the socialist Forward have much politically in common but as an unofficial and spontaneous pressure group, they collectively ensured that the issue of press control and censorship was a constant Parliamentary topic.[69]

Some voices carried more political weight than others - Dalziel, proprietor of the Pall Mall Gazette, Reynolds News and the Evening Standard, and a close confidant of Lloyd George's was instrumental in ensuring that Regulation 27 (a) dealing with the reporting of cabinet meetings would be interpreted leniently. Lawson proprietor of the Daily Telegraph was in close touch with Unionist opinion and as a member with Sir George Toulmin of the Joint Committee, was in regular negotiation with the Press Bureau and Service departments. The hand of Lawson can be discerned behind the War Office instruction to local military authorities in 1914, that all serious cases involving press breaches of the regulations be referred to the Service departments for decision.[70] Other voices, like those of Hogge, Pringle and Healey spoke so frequently on press issues that their contributions were listened to with less than rapt attention but the cumulative effect of the group's constant vigilance was to foil any attempt made by the authorities to introduce repressive legislation aimed directly at the newspaper press.

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69. Sir William Sutherland suggested that Lloyd George should use the energies of this loosely knit group for recruiting and munitions campaigns 'instead of leaving them idle and disgruntled on the watch for any mistake', Sutherland to Lloyd George, 10th June 1915, Lloyd George Papers, D 18/18/2.House of Lords Record Office.

70. Brade Memorandum to C.M.A.'s,December 1914, P.R.O. HO 139/25/ A993/0.

The various controversies we have so far recorded underline the fact that most sections of the newspaper press during the war retained freedom of opinion and the right to criticize which its representatives had demanded and obtained in the pre-war negotiations. Despite his ambiguous and provocative public statements,[71] Buckmaster in private fought against any form of political pressure to silence newspaper opinion. Churchill had demanded action against the Morning Post for its bitter criticism of his handling of the Antwerp evacuation in October 1914. Buckmaster firmly refused. While he was more than anxious to see that the D.O.R.A. Regulations were observed by the press and offenders duly punished 'in my opinion,' he wrote to Churchill, 'the Press Bureau has no legal authority entitling it to suppress criticism excepting as far as such criticism may involve the disclosure of military or naval operations...To stifle criticism of the government or ministers...is not...within the provinces of this office and ought not to be allowed'.[72]

Despite Buckmaster having stated publicly that the censorship was to operate against information likely to depress, comment and criticism in leader columns and feature articles, which were never submitted to the Bureau for censorship, regularly did this throughout the war. The vicious attacks by the right wing newspapers upon Haldane for allegedly having gravely weakened the army before the war, the Northcliffe papers' attacks upon Kitchener and upon Asquith for policies of 'Wait and Lose', the later attacks by Lovat Fraser in the Daily Mail in 1918 upon the High Command and the widespread criticism of the Admiralty

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71. In several Parliamentary statements of Press Bureau policy, Buckmaster, who like Smith had an unerring ability to antagonize the House of Commons, stated that he would stop any statement that suggested to people that their affairs were not in good hands (House of Commons Debates, 5th Series, 12th November 1914 Col. 129). On 8th February 1915 he said that he saw his job as stopping anything which might unduly depress the British people (Col. 350-1) and in the House of Lords on the 3rd of November 1915 he gave a very strong impression that criticism of Government Ministers was very shortly to be 'curtailed' (Col.157).

72. Buckmaster to Churchill, 11th October 1914, P.R.O. HO 139/5/A48/1.

over the shipping losses in 1917 - all of these could certainly be construed as depressing comments upon the British prospects of victory and of possible use to the enemy. But there were no prosecutions. Indeed, Sir John Simon, when Home Secretary, boasted about how amazed the Austrian press was at the freedom allowed to newspapers in war-time Britain[73] and Herbert Samuel, who succeeded Simon, regarded it as 'vital that there should be freedom for the organs of public opinion to criticize the conduct and administration of Ministers...'[74] Editors like H.A. Gwynne of the Morning Post regarded it as their constitutional duty to express criticism of the conduct of the war. As he told Buckmaster at the time of Churchill's involvement in the Antwerp expedition: '...what course is a newspaper editor to take when he sees things going absolutely wrong?...in this or any other criticism I may from time to time publish I shall be guided only by what I consider to be the needs of the nation...'[75]

But this freedom had its constraints. The dispensation granted most newspapers to say what they liked was not absolute. Newspapers were free to criticize the political and strategic prosecution of the war, often in the most blistering of terms but they were not so free to speak out or agitate against the country's participation in the war itself. Socialist newspapers like Forward, The Herald or the Labour Leader were opposed to the war but they were scrupulous in their avoidance of open opposition or in making statements that could be construed as discouraging recruitment, much to the annoyance of Home Office and Press Bureau officials anxious to trap them.

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73. House of Commons Debates, 5th Series, 2nd March 1915, Col. 758.

74. House of Commons Debates, 5th Series, 8th May 1916, Col. 422.

75. Gwynne to Buckmaster, 13th October 1915, P.R.O. 139/5/A48/1. This passionate declaration of journalistic ethics was as shallow as it was pompous. Like other editors such as Blumenfield of the Daily Express, Strachey of the Spectator, Leo Maxse of the National Review and proprietors like Northcliffe - all rabidly patriotic - Gwynne could never understand that Haldane, pacifists or even those opposed to National Service could also have 'a sense of responsibility...to the...needs of the nation' ibid.

Irish Republican newspapers and pacifist newspapers, by virtue of their political convictions, were not so careful and were not so fortunate. They were not included under the mantle of liberty boasted of by successive Home Secretaries and were subject to spasmodic harrassment from the authorities particularly during the later stages of the war. Nor had they any powerful Parliamentary or press friends to defend their right to free expression of opinion. Not only were many newspapers indifferent to the treatment meted out to them but the harrassment was conducted with the active support and encouragement of the majority of metropolitan and provincial newspapers. 'We love liberty', said the Daily Mirror on 16th November 1917, 'but freedom to help the enemy is not the sort we appreciate' - a view representative of the majority of newspapers towards the pacifist press.

When four Irish Republican newspapers,[76] were suppressed in December 1914 few newspapers bothered to report the event and of those that did most supported the repressive action. In the same edition as a leader bitterly condemning the Press Bureau for its inefficiency, unfairness and lack of judgement, the Irish Times welcomed the suppression of the seditious 'rags' (7th December 1914) and cited the London Times which had declared that 'The Government are to be congratulated on their response,tardy enough though it has been 'in suppressing newspapers' which it argued had been financially supported by 'German/American allies'. Even Forward which had close links with James Connolly, editor of the Irish Worker, one of the suppressed newspapers, while arguing that 'forcible closing of the Press or any section of it (however disagreeable its opinions may be to any ruling authority) is a grave and serious matter for the national welfare...' was equivocal in its belief in the right of absolute free speech: 'Writing frankly we find it impossible to condemn the Government for its actions in regard to some of these(Irish) periodicals'. (Forward 12th December 1914).

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76. The Irish Worker, the Irish Volunteer, Sein Fein, and Irish Freedom all of which had in varying degrees strongly opposed recruitment of Irishmen to fight in the British army.

In Parliament, it was the frequent complaint of Irish Nationalist M.P.'s like Tim Healey, Beaverbrook's friend, and Laurence Ginnell that while M.P.'s such as Hogge and Pringle were active in the defence of press freedom in England, they remained indifferent to the fate of the minority Irish press: 'It was well said', quipped Healey in the House of Commons on 11th November 1915 'that a fire in the Strand is of more importance than a burning mountain in China but surely Ireland is part of the British Empire'.[77] He was pointing to the fury being expressed in the Commons over the suppression of The Globe and the prosecution in camera, albeit unsuccessfully, of the Labour Leader in Salford which was being described by Sir William Byles, Liberal M.P. for Salford as the first attacks on the liberty of the press when 'within the last twelve months the Government have seized and suppressed, body and bones, type and printing presses, without word of protest from either Scotland (both Hogge and Pringle sat for Scottish constituencies) or from Salford'.[78]

Under the direction of Sir George Cave, Home Secretary in the Lloyd George Government, the Home Office in early 1917 engaged a Q.C., Mr, Ellis Griffith, Liberal M.P. for Anglesey and later Sir Arthur Bodkin Q.C. to monitor a list of sixteen socialist/pacifist journals.[79] If, in their opinion, matter published in these journals transgressed the Regulations the case was sent to the Director of Public Prosecutions for consideration. As we have already noted the D.P.P's office tended to take the view that these cases involving small circulation minority papers, were in the words of one counsel at the D.P.P.'s office Guy Stephenson,'not worth powder and shot'[80]. But senior Home Office officials encouraged by Cave were not prepared to leave matters at that and their practice became in such cases, to inform the local police who raided the premises of the organization's printers, seized copies of the offending journal or leaflet and

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77. House of Commons Debates,5th Series, 11th November 1915, Col. 1428.
78. ibid.
79. P.R.O. HO 45/10786/297549/52.
80. Stephenson to Home Office, 25th October 1917, P.R.O. HO 45/11099/280126/43.

usually threatened to confiscate the printer's machinery unless he agreed either to cease publication of the journal for the duration of the war or to submit copy before printing to the Press Bureau. By careful editorship and through Lloyd George's political protection, the Labour Leader and The Herald were spared this ignominious treatment but socialist and pacifist papers like the Workers Dreadnought, The Call and the Tribunal were often forced to cease publication for a brief interval until they were able to find new and more tolerant printers, not an easy task in the xenophobic days of late 1917 and early 1918.

A letter in the Morning Post on the 27th of August 1917 drew the Home Office's attention to a cartoon in the 25th August edition of the Workers Dreadnought which showed Christ marched off by a soldier to a place where the Bishop of London, who had recently preached a sermon in favour of the war, was sat by a gun. The case was sent by Sir Ernley Blackwell of the Home office to Sir Charles Matthews the Director of Public Prosecutions who replied on the 30th of August that he felt 'the cartoon is in the grossest taste but apart from the view I entertain that any prosecution of Miss Sylvia Pankhurst and the Workers Dreadnought would be a waste of time and money I fail to see how the Defence of the Realm Regulations have been broken by the publication of this repugnant. cartoon'.[81] Despite this advice and the information from Scotland Yard that most of the offending issue would have been distributed anyway,Sir George Cave minuted : ' I think it is better to seize the surplus copies for what it is worth'.[82] Ninety eight copies were seized and destroyed on the 1st of September 1917.

Police raided the National Labour Press, printers of the Workers Dreadnought on 4th of October 1917 in an attempt to seize the current issue of the Dreadnought which contained an article by G.D.H. Cole about health hazards to women working in munitions factories. The issue had already been distributed so the police seized and destroyed the 6th of October

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81. Matthews to Home Office, P.R.O. HO 45/11009/280126/20. Influenced by the revolutionary events in Russia, Sylvia Pankhurst had changed the title of the Dreadnought from Women's to Workers in July 1917.

82. Cave minute, 1st September 1917, ibid.

edition and forced the printer to agree not to print any further copies of the Dreadnought while the Defence of the Realm Regulations were in operation or face the seizure of plant and equipment. Although such harrassment was disruptive it was not totally destructive and minority journals, fired by deeply held convictions and low overheads, were quickly back in circulation - the Dreadnought was back in business on this occasion by the end of October printed by a new and sympathetic printer.

Most newspapers remained either indifferent to the fate of these minority papers or applauded and encouraged the police raids. The Daily Express published an article by C.B. Stanton Independent Labour M.P. for Merthyr Tydfil on 6th January 1916 entitled 'The Enemy in our Midst'which argued that George Lansbury, editor of The Herald should be shot for having published a pacifist cartoon by Will Dyson. Reporting gleefully of '7 Raids/ in last 48 Hours' on printers of pacifist newspapers on 16th November 1917, the Express welcomed the Government's tougher policy against 'the pestilential and subterranean influence' (of)'the pacifist plague'. When an export ban was placed on the sales of The Nation for having had its criticisms of British strategy broadcast on German wireless some sections of the press heartily supported the administrative action taken against 'Mr. Massingham's acrid and despairing utterances'(The Spectator, 21st April 1917). Another right wing journal, the Saturday Review was highly critical of the Parliamentary support that The Nation received, especially it argued, from four ex-Cabinet Ministers (McKenna, Runciman, Churchill and Samuel) who had been involved in the suppression of The Globe. 'They chattered trifles', mocked the Review on the 21st of April 1917 'about freedom of the Press, complained idiotically that The Times and the Daily Mail had been quoted in Germany also and had not been penalized...they posed as Miltons and were ready with their Areopagiticas but their arguments were about as trivial and contemptible we have ever had from Cabinet Ministers'.

Philip Snowden and Ramsay MacDonald were violently attacked in the jingo press for pointing to the disparity in treatment between pro-war

large circulation newspapers however impudently they violated the Regulations and that meted out to the small circulation pacifist press. 'How much longer', wrote Bottomley in John Bull for 24th November 1917, 'are the Government going to hesitate before the MacDonaldbacher and Snowdenstein gang are put against a wall and shot?' The Sunday Pictorial could with impunity publish on 11th November 1917 an article by Admiral W.H. Henderson headed Wanted - A Naval War Staff containing a critical resume of Admiralty war-time policy which must certainly have made interesting reading in Berlin while on the following Sunday it published an article by Horatio Bottomley which called for a 'Dictatorship' to deal with grave dangers to the national cause posed by 'pacifists, Bishops, Humanitarians and all the rest'. The most blatant example of such discrimination practised by the authorities between a large circulation, pro-war newspaper and the small pacifist press occurred in February 1918. D 621 of 4th February 1918 urgently requested that it was 'of the utmost importance that no reference whatever'[83] be made of the Inter-Allied Reserve Scheme which had been agreed that month at Versailles. Repington who had recently left The Times to join the Morning Post learnt of the scheme from his military sources and wrote a highly critical article which H.A. Gwynne submitted to the Press Bureau for censorship. This was returned 'not to be published', an order which Gwynne decided to ignore by publishing Repington's article on 11th February. In the article, Repington attacked Lloyd George and other politicians for having 'exclusively occupied themselves in teaching soldiers how and where to make war'. He said that the Prime Minister had 'practically eliminated the General Staff in London from authority on the Western Front and had deprived the Field Marshal Commander-in-Chief (Haig) of one of his most indispensable means of action' by removing control of the army's reserve to a committee of generals under General Foch based at Versailles.

At a War Cabinet on 12th February 1918 which discussed the issue, Lloyd George, stated that it was not the first time that Colonel Repington had published information 'which was of the utmost value to the enemy'.[84] The

83. P.R.O. HO 139/45.

84. P.R.O. Cab 23/5 W.C. 342/16.

Director of Public Prosecutions informed the Cabinet that the most effective method in such cases was to seize the printing presses, which at a Cabinet meeting later that day it was decided should be done.[85] However later that same evening (the 12th) Lloyd George revoked the decision to seize the printing presses 'after an informal meeting with the Home Secretary and certain legal and other objections had been considered'[86] Instead individual prosecutions were brought against Repington and Gwynne who were each fined £100.

No such 'legal and other objectives' prevented the seizure of The Vanguard's printing presses that same month or the imprisonment of the country's leading mathematician and philosopher, Bertrand Russell for six months on the 9th of February 1918 for writing an article in The Tribunal on the 3rd of January 1918 warning of the dangers posed for British democracy by the presence of American armed forces in Britain (It was alleged by the prosecution that Russell's article was likely to prejudice His Majesty's Relations with the United States, an ally and thus an offence against Regulation 27)[87]. It was the lone voice of Ramsay MacDonald who pointed to the anomaly: 'that if an article (Repington's) one twentieth as malicious had been published under the name of Mr. Bertrand Russell the Government would not have hesitated five minutes as to what its course of action should be...All I say to the Government is this : if you are going to repress, repress fairly; if you are going to prosecute, prosecute fairly; but do not deal with Mr Bertrand Russell one way and with this military writer (Repington) in another'[88] The Daily News was one of the few newspapers to make the same point. 'We are not complaining of (Russell's sentence) heavy as it was but only of the astonishing disparity between it and the fines inflicted yesterday upon Col. Repington and the editor of the Morning Post...by the same magistrate' (12th February 1918).

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85. The Solicitor General, Sir Gordon Hewart argued that 'in the event of a prosecution not only would discussion of the subject dealt with by the article be necessary but also one recalcitrant juryman might render the prosecution null and void,- a neat summary of the reasons why the use of Regulation 51 had become more common. ibid.

86. What appears to have been the deciding factor was a statement by General MacDonough, Director of Military Intelligence (and a close friend and very likely source of Repington's information) that in the event of a prosecution 'he would find it very difficult to state on oath in a court of law that information had been given which was likely to be of any great use to the enemy', ibid.

87. P.R.O. HO 45/ 111012/314670/3.

88. House of Commons Debates, 5th Series, 12th February 1918, Cols. 39-40.

MacDonald had earlier criticized the inconsistency, as he saw it, of the censorship authorities for not prosecuting the Daily Mail for publishing a story about the sinking of a hospital ship in the Bristol channel which had been prohibited by the Press Bureau when, as he told readers of his regular column in Forward, 'on the same day as Sir George Cave was making excuses for leaving the Carmelite Boss (Northcliffe) alone, his sleuths raided the office of The Call over an article on the Russian Revolution.....you see it is not possible to take action against Alf of the Fifty Press foghorns'. (26th January 1918) Macdonald shared with a host of politicians and editors an insatiable desire to see Northcliffe in the dock. Protests in the name of democracy against the prosecution or suppression of a newspaper were almost invariably leavened with cries for similarly repressive action to be taken against a Northcliffe owned paper or papers. 'Why not the Evening News and the Sunday Dispatch as well?' was the Liberal press reaction to the suppression of The Globe in early November 1915. 'Will the Secretary of State for War (Lloyd George)...now consider the desirability of dealing with The Times and Daily Mail?' asked Mr. Dillon in the House of Commons at the time of the suppression of Forward in January 1916.[89] When the Home Secretary, Sir John Simon, criticized Northcliffe's Daily Mail for publishing a map of the Balkans (allegedly of use to the enemy) during a Commons debate called specifically by Simon to rebuke Northcliffe, Pringle, Dalziel and other M.P.'s were scornful. that no prosecution had been brought against Northcliffe. 'Cowardice in the face of Lord Northcliffe' charged Pringle[90] an accusation levelled at successive Home Secretaries during the war.

Reasons for this perpetual sniping at Northcliffe are not hard to discover. His newspapers had done much to create a public prepared and eager for war with Germany and he became obsessively committed to its successful prosecution. He regarded the Press Bureau

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89. House of Commons Debates, 5th Series, 4th January 1916. Col. 804.
90. House of Commons Debates, 5th Series, 30 November 1915, Col. 632.

as inefficient and unnecessary and he made sure that his newspapers were the least cooperative and most critical of the censorship operation. With some courage and armed with the belief that politicians believed his newspapers to be immensely powerful he attacked national idols like Kitchener and the Admiralty for inefficiency and lack of vision. His newspapers were not prosecuted, apart from several minor scrapes, because along with the criticisms, they carried a sustained propaganda in favour of recruitment and national efficiency and they attacked all forms of opposition to the war with such unremitting zeal that they were believed to be too important to the war effort to alienate or suppress. Once Northcliffe and Rothermere had become personally involved in government it became virtually impossible anyway for any government to act against their newspapers as Austen Chamberlain complained of in the House of Commons on 11th March 1918 : 'The mere fact that some of them (press proprietors) are Ministers will make the discharge of his duties by my right Hon. Friend the Home Secretary and the other Ministers concerned more invidious and more difficult'.[91] By constantly criticizing and disparaging the Press Bureau, Northcliffe's newspapers assisted in undermining its authority and allaying its more repressive inclinations - in effect providing a shield for other newspapers to engage in similar criticisms without undue fear of executive reprisals. Not that other newspapers saw it in those terms blinded as many of them were by the jealousies of the pre-war years.

Buckmaster certainly recognized the role played by the Northcliffe newspapers. He became convinced that a successful prosecution against The Times, the most prestigious star in the Northcliffe galaxy,

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91. House of Commons Debates. 5th Series, 11th March 1918, Col. 78. Northcliffe was appointed head of the British Mission to the United States in 1917 and Director of Enemy Propaganda in March 1918. His brother Rothermere was Secretary for Air in 1917/18 and Director of Propaganda to Neutral Countries from March 1918.

would be an immense boost to the authority and prestige of the Bureau. The Press Bureau files during Smith and Buckmaster's periods as Directors reveal a vendetta-like situation existing between the Bureau and Printing House Square with Buckmaster persistently complaining to Brade and Graham Greene that 'nothing is to be done to The Times for having 'deliberately broken what we regard in this office as very important notices'.[92] When The Times was eventually prosecuted in June 1915 for having published a letter allegedly criticizing the French war effort, the case was dismissed by the magistrates. No other case was brought against The Times during the war which continued throughout to treat the Bureau with magisterial contempt.

The Times case is one of a series we have discussed in this chapter which discredits the idea put about by contemporary commentators, notably Repington, that the press censorship during the war was harsh and repressive. Repington's pieces were severely censored but by his own editor, Geoffrey Dawson and only rarely by the Bureau.[93] He was prosecuted but for revealing highly sensitive, secret information for which he was fined a mere £100. Despite the virtual immunity of his papers from prosecution Northcliffe later put it about that he and his editors lived for much of the war in constant fear of arrest in the light of their challenge to the censorship authorities. M.P.'s understandably concerned at individual and isolated cases of press repression made speeches of great rhetoric:

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92. Buckmaster to Greene, P.R.O. HO 139/5/A 127/Part2/23. The 'very important notices' were sailing times of Cross Channel ferries. Dawson argued that these could be seen at any railway station to which Buckmaster delivered the riposte that 'station walls were not sent to Germany but copies of The Times were usually seen by the German High Command'. Buckmaster to Dawson, 22nd March 1915, ibid.

93. Of 54 articles by Repington submitted by The Times to the Press Bureau for censorship, 29 were passed 'without alteration,'20 were 'very slightly censored', 2 were 'heavily censored' and 2 'stopped altogether'. Press Bureau memorandum, P.R.O. HO 139/30/A1180/1. As Dawson wrote to Haig on the 30th January 1918: 'I have no doubt at all that..his own position as a writer is due largely to the fact that I ..refused so many of his articles...the excisions (of published articles) were very largely personalities which I thought mistakes..You yourself..were one of his intended victims for a large part of the war'.'Dawson' The Times Archive.

'I rubbed my eyes', said Sir William Byles at the time of the suppression of The Globe and asked : 'Am I in England or in Deutschland?'[94] - which gave a totally false impression of the power and range of the press censorship operation. Later commentators have followed suit, portraying the censorship as severely repressive and rigorously controlling the entire operations of the British press. One recent press historian has suggested that 'During the First World War...the censors so deprived the population of news that defeatist rumours spread. The press revolted. Voluntary censorship was gradually agreed upon...[95] A more inaccurate description of the press censorship it would be hard to discover.

The D.O.R.A. Regulations were severe and affected all sections of society including the press but there was never any question of the press being placed in a legal straight jacket under the inquisitorial eye of a Prussian-like institution from which, after a noble struggle, it emerged free. So far as most newspapers were concerned the Regulations which supported the censorship were leniently interpreted under a system which was voluntary and remained so throughout the war. The war-time editor of the Labour Leader when questioned as to the severity of the censorship found it hard to recall that there had been a press censorship at all.[96] The Press Bureau was set up hurriedly without clear legal authority or administrative status. It could only recommend prosecutions to government departments and a judiciary which were reluctant to alienate a cooperative press. When repressive action was taken the shouts of protest were loud and powerful enough to ensure that most newspapers were left alone to say what they liked about the government and armed forces' conduct of the war. Except that is for the small number of Irish Republican,socialist and pacifist

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94. House of Commons Debates, 5th Series, 11th November 1915, Col. 1424.

95. C.J. Bertrand, The British Press : An Historical Survey (Paris, O.C.D.L., 1969) p. 153.

96. Lord Fenner Brockway in conversation with the author, House of Lords,April 1978.

newspapers whose harrassment at the encouragement or complacent silence of most other newspapers remains an ugly blemish on the record of the British press.

Press reactions to the manner in which the Regulations were interpreted matched those of the authorities in selectivity and inconsistency. Liberal papers applauded the suppression of right wing jingo papers who in turn called for action against the socialist and pacifist press and almost all were united in demanding repressive measures against Northcliffe and his 'foghorns'. Politicians concerned with press issues shifted their ground just as swiftly. In the House of Lords in 1915 Milner argued that critics like The Globe were 'the best friends of government... the docile portion of the Press, with its eminent want of candour in its efforts to defend the indefensible (the record of the Asquith Government) is very often their worst enemy'.[97] But when as Minister for War under fire from these 'best of friends' over the Inter-Allied Reserve Scheme he was writing to Lloyd George that 'I think the sooner we make a move (to suppress The Globe and other press critics) the better. This kind of thing cannot be allowed to go on'.[98] As Leader of the Opposition Bonar Law was a champion of free speech boldly defending the right of M.P's and newspapers to criticize incompetence in government 'even though this does cause a weakening of confidence in the Government that is carrying on the War'.[99] But as a government minister, he sang quite a different tune defending the export ban on The Nation for example on the grounds that '...any Government which deliberately allows views of that kind (that British strategy was inferior to German) to be circulated abroad would instantly deserve to be asked to resign and give place to others'.[100]

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97. House of Lords Debates, 5th Series, 8th November 1915, Col. 193.
98. Milner to Lloyd Geroge, 8th February 1918, Lloyd George Papers, F/38/3/10, House of Lords Record Office.
99. House of Commons Debates, 5th Series, 23rd November 1914, Col. 919.
100. House of Commons Debates, 5th Series, 9th May 1917, Col. 1198.

We have discussed the various authorities which intervened in the operation of the press censorship and we have observed the limitations which restrained them. We have seen that it is to take an exaggerated view of the use made of the D.O.R.A. Regulations to describe the censorship as 'irresponsible tyranny' (Daily News, 30th November 1917) and that F.E. Smith, in replying to charges of harsh censorship decisions was for once in tune with the situation when he told the House of Commons in 1916 : '...it is amazing not that so many cases have been introduced in which error or excessive authority is alleged but that so few cases have been cited in the course of this Debate'.[101] Why was it then, if as has been argued here, most newspapers were left unmolested by the law and most cooperated patriotically with the Press Bureau instructions and requests, that the press censorship was so publicly reviled in Parliament and in the press? The answer was, as we shall discuss in Chapter VI that the press heartily disliked a system which because of its hapharzard, voluntary nature detrimentally affected (or so they believed) their commercial competitiveness, disrupted the flow of news and which was in the opinion of many journalists so inefficiently conducted that many were provoked into speculating like The Times '...that the work of censorship might better have been left to the newspapers themselves...' (9th February 1915).

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101. House of Commons Debates, 5th Series, 23rd March 1916, Col. 447. Smith was Attorney General in the Asquith Coalition government of 1915-16.

CHAPTER VI

Self-Censorship

'My own experience is...the matter (censorship) had much better be left to the conscience of the Press itself'. G.B. Shaw, The Nation, 21st April 1917.

No other institution during the war came in for as much vilification from the press as the Press Bureau and its administration of the press censorship. There were several grievances. Firstly that the Bureau did not function as that source of 'trustworthy information'[1] as promised by Churchill in August 1914, secondly that as a system of censorship it was unfair and inefficient and lastly given the degree of self-censorship practised by most journalists that it was unnecessary. Journalists came to regard the Bureau as an affront to their professional skill and a dangerous impediment to the vigorous prosecution of the war, a manifestation of the failure of successive war-time governments to trust in the patriotic common sense of the press. Why have an inefficient censorship which did international harm to the reputation of the British government it was argued, when journalists were proving quite capable of doing the job far better themselves?

The supply of war news at the beginning of the war was in a hopeless mess as we have seen in Chapters I and II. With the establishment of the Bureau, newspapers hoped that matters would improve. They didn't. Allied bulletins and official despatches during the Autumn and Spring of 1914/15 issued through the Bureau, remained vague and optimistic and there were no war correspondents to add a touch of realism to these official but highly obscure versions of events. Thus it is not surprising that many newspapers, perceiving it as their patriotic (and by no means unprofitable) duty, followed suit with exaggerated headlines and misleading placards.

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1. House of Commons Debates, 5th Series, 7th August 1914, Col. 2153-56.

They could hardly be blamed when presented with official stories of German rifle fire being 'poor while British rifle fire has devastated every column of attack that has presented itself with the result that our men have established a personal ascendancy over the Germans...' (Official Press Bureau bulletin, 6th September 1914). The News of the World wrote this up with the headlines : 'The Turn-Tail Army/Terror Stricken Germans Cut/Down Like Chaff'. Official euphoria following the Battle of the Marne affected even well informed commentators like Repington of The Times who wrote on 14th September 1914 that 'The German troops are reported to be worn out' and Germany'sposition to be 'unenviable' with supplies and morale in a critical state. The blandness and official optimism sprang from the top : 'The (British) cavalry', wrote Sir John French in November 1914, 'do as they like with the enemy until they are confronted with thrice their number. The German patrols simply fly before our horsemen' (Official Despatch, The Times, November 20th 1914).

The appointment in October 1914 of Colonel E.W. Swinton as an official 'Eye Witness' had merely increased the supply of officially inspired drivel emanating from France. He was so hemmed in by a triple censorship (G.H.Q., Kitchener and the Press Bureau) and by his own Service attitudes - 'naturally statements of wounded officers could be accepted more literally than those of the rank and file'[2] - that he could well have written his copy sitting in the comfort of his London club. Swinton himself admitted that he relied on divisional and daily intelligence reports rather than visit the front himself as when he did he 'got into trouble for reporting what I saw'[3]. In the Spring of 1915, following the military setbacks at Neuve Chapelle, influential sections of the press took alarm at these persistently optimistic official accounts and presentations which sharply contradicted the information many editors were receiving

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2. Major General Sir Ernest Swinton, Eye Witness (London, Hodder & Stoughton, 1935) p. 77.
3. ibid. p.57

privately, either from former employees home from leave or from their political and military sources. The Press Bureau was also alarmed at the continual exaggerated press coverage which was receiving press and Parliamentary attention. The Sunday Pictorial for example heralded Neuve Chapelle as a victory for 'superior strategy' and on 14th March featured a double page article by Horatio Bottomley who interpreted the initial breakthrough of British infantrymen (which was not followed up) as 'the beginning of the end...June...will find hostilities suspended pending discussion of the terms of peace'.

The Bureau characteristically bungled things by issuing a D Notice (D 183) on 12th March 1915 which infuriated all sections of the press by blaming the newspapers for 'false and exaggerated headlines'[4] and annoyed Churchill, First Lord of the Admiralty, who took the view that any attempt 'to discourage the Press as a whole from taking a favourable view of the news which they receive from day to day is greatly to be deprecated; if the contrary tendency is to be developed, the difficulties for those responsible for the conduct of the war would be greatly increased'.[5] The deep resentment over the decision about war correspondents and the poor quality of news bulletins quickly manifest itself in press reaction to this D Notice. Sir George Riddell, Secretary of the N.P.A. wrote to Buckmaster stating that 'whatever views they (the press) had given expression to were founded upon information supplied by the Press Bureau'.[6] The N.P.A. sent a resolution to the Bureau on 27th March 1915 pointing out that '...if the people are being unduly soothed and elated, the responsibility lies with the Government and not with the Press' and that as for the news situation, the naval and military authorities must not think only of the enemy but also of 'the commercial and industrial classes at home upon whom so much depends'.[7]

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4. D 183 cited some glaring examples. Using as its authority a telegram from the New York Tribune which stated that 'everything possible is being done by the German Government to regulate the use and further conservation of supplies', the Daily Express for example ran the headline : 'Germany on the Verge of Famine/ Fight for Food'. P.R.O. HO 139/22/A885/2.
5. Churchill to Buckmaster, 28th March 1915, ibid.
6. Riddell to Buckmaster, 22nd March 1915, ibid.
7. N.P.A. Resolution, 27th March 1915, ibid.

Buckmaster, recognizing that a serious credibility gap was developing between official accounts of events and informed press opinion, immediately wrote to Asquith informing him of the N.P.A. resolution and of how pressmen had long felt aggrieved at 'the paucity of complete accounts of all Naval and Military Operations whether they involved success or reverses to our arms'.[8] He told Asquith that what had moved the press in particular was the effect on the 'attitude of certain industrial classes (about) the great losses we have incurred by the re-taking of the village of Neuve Chapelle'. In other words, Buckmaster went on, the industrial classes will not be convinced of the need of great and sustained efforts if they hear 'only continual reports of successes to our arms'.[9] Asquith agreed to meet representatives of the press at Downing Street on the 1st of April 1915 where, according to the Press Bureau account of the meeting, Harry Lawson, later Lord Burnham, proprietor of the Daily Telegraph went to the heart of the matter by telling Asquith that 'owing to the arrangements made with the Government before the war was thought of, the Press expected to be allowed to send correspondents to the front but that had not been permitted. The Press therefore depended upon official information and all of it (was) optimistic whether conveyed by the Government or by the Naval or Military authorities'.[10]

In some respects the press wanted it both ways. They said, for example, that they accepted the need for some form of censorship in war-time but when an item was stopped, they almost invariably howled. Similarly, they objected to optimistically written despatches but they invariably wrote them up optimistically in their papers. Northcliffe wrote to Asquith in November 1914 complaining of the 'apathy, ignorance and ridiculous optimism' of many newspapers and

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8. Buckmaster to Asquith, 22nd March 1915, P.R.O. 139/22/A835/2.
9. ibid.
10. Press Bureau Memorandum, April 1915, ibid.

journals.[11] Yet on 6th March 1915 his Daily Mail ran a lead story about the sinking of a U boat (U8) off the coast of Dover which the Mail took as a sign that 'The German campaign is collapsing not merely in ridicule but in disaster'. Two days later the Mail was blaming official 'optimism' as the root cause of the industrial troubles on the Clyde : 'The whole tendency of (official) news of the war...is to minimise our difficulties, exaggerate the enemy's failure and to encourage the notion that Germany is as good as beaten...'. (8th March 1915). The Observer on 18th March 1915 complained of Sir John French giving 'an unduly optimistic impression first' about the action at Neuve Chapelle and then, went on The Observer, he 'darkens it afterwards...nothing could be more mistaken and injurious to public interest than the witholding of the more disagreeable part of the news...' But on 3rd October 1915 The Observer commenting on French's early pronouncements about the Battle of Loos ran the headline : 'The Touch of Victory' followed by an article which declared that 'The Allied guns here in the West have done more to pulverize the enemy's defences...they have shaken at last the complacency of Berlin...there has been masterly preparations and a glorious result' which French himself could hardly have bettered for wishful thinking.

As a step towards improving the supply of news, it was agreed at the Downing Street meeting in April that Riddell should see Kitchener, Asquith and Churchill 'from time to time', for background briefings which were to be distributed privately to proprietors and editors. This caused so much resentment from those newspapers excluded from the arrangement and the pressure for war correspondents became so persistent, especially from the United States, that the system was quickly abandoned and Kitchener agreed to allow five accredited correspondents to go to France in May 1915. But as we shall see later in this chapter, having war correspondents did little to stem the flow of optimistic news emanating from the direction of G.H.Q. although it went some way to satisfying the commercial demand for exciting and professionally written war stories which sold newspapers.

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11. Cited in Earl of Oxford and Asquith, op. cit.,(1928), p. 234.

The whole issue of the release of information became something of a vicious circle. By delaying despatches the Services encouraged the spread of rumours and an unstable public opinion. Churchill, when at the Admiralty for example 'would hold on to a bit of bad news for a time on the chance of getting a bit of good news to publish as an offset'[12]. When newspapers objected to being treated as '...adults with the minds of children'(Reynolds's Newspaper, 15th April 1915) and the very latest news was released, for example Balfour's interim report about the Battle of Jutland with its emphasis on heavy British losses - a storm of protest ensued, confirming in Service minds the volatile state of public opinion. There were legitimate Service reasons why information was not always released to the Press Bureau - for example it was difficult for the Admiralty on many occasions to supply more than a brief outline at first of an engagement many thousands of miles away at sea. Similarly G.H.Q. were reluctant to release imcomplete statements of an action before all reports were at hand.

But then, as now, the Services and other government departments were instinctively reluctant to release information; they preferred, again like today, the inspired leak to an individual journalist rather than use the more official channels like the Bureau. Military and naval experts like Arthur Pollen, Cornford Cope, Colonel A.M. Murray and Rear Admiral Henderson in their analyses of the course of the war tended to reveal a fairly accurate picture of the latest events gleaned from their Service contacts. Repington, the military correspondent of The Times for example, after a visit to the War Office or to G.H.Q. in France, quite often published information which had not been made available to the Bureau much to the Directors' annoyance and fury of rival newspapers. At the April meeting, Asquith like most modern Prime Ministers, ordered a stop to this form of unofficial leakage but to little avail. A circular issued on the 18th of July 1916, reminding departments to supply all information for

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12. Brownrigg, op. cit.,(1920), p. 13.

public release to the Press Bureau 'was for all practical purposes, ignored'[13]. The Bureau argued quite convincingly to the departments that it needed to be kept fully up to date in order both to do its job as a censor and to keep at bay the horde of journalists who were permanently stationed at the Bureau's premises but according to Sir Frank Swettenham interviewed in 1939 '...the Service Departments fell far short of what was wanted in the way of communicating information to the Press Bureau. There was...a curious jealousy and they could sometimes prevent publication by witholding information'.[14]

A voluntary press censorship is bound to be unfair and any system so dependent on the decisions of other departments is almost certain to be inefficient. The newspaper press never fully came to terms with these factors and the departments concerned never fully realised the degree of annoyance such failures in the system evoked. A voluntary system is endemically unfair in its operation because as we have seen throughout this thesis, not all newspapers will submit the same story and those that do and have stories stopped inevitably feel aggrieved and at a commercial disadvantage when they see the same story blazoned across their rival's front page. In a voluntary system there was no answer to this problem as E.T. Cook pointed out to A.F.Hird of The Times following a complaint that The Times had had a story about a submarine engagement stopped only to see it prominently displayed in the following morning's edition of the Morning Post. Cook made the familiar observation that The Times had submitted their proof but the Morning Post had not and that 'instances of this kind are very common and as the censorship is on a voluntary basis, it is not easy to see how it is to be prevented'[15] And it never was. In January 1918 the Daily Chronicle observed somewhat sardonically : 'To send an article to the Press Bureau is to invite a severity of treatment which can be escaped by the simple process of not sending'.

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13. 'The Official Press Bureau', op. cit.

14. Sir Frank Swettenham in interview with Admiral C.V. Usborne, Director of Censorship Division, Ministry of Information, 22nd December 1939, P.R.O. Cab. Prem 1/439.

15. Cook to Hird, 14th December 1915, P.R.O. HO 139/15/A584/Part 2.

There were other charges of unfairness touching the raw nerve of commercial rivalry which could have been avoided in a better run system. Riddell wrote to Swettenham on 21st October 1915 complaining about the publication of pacifist letters in the Glasgow Evening Times which he considered a scandal. He went on to air a widely shared grievance of the Fleet Street press that the Bureau lavished more attention on them than on the provincial press. Riddell found it strange, he told Swettenham that 'no one makes a careful examination of the papers which circulate amongst the working classes to the extent of millions of copies per day...the system is ridiculous. The censorship is geographical. A paper with a 20,000 circulation amongst the upper classes (i.e. Westminster Gazette) is gone through most carefully. A paper with a 300,000 circulation amongst the working classes in Glasgow is never looked at and has probably never been heard of. Far too much attention is paid to London'.[16]

The accusation was correct but misleading because Fleet Street papers submitted far more copy to the Bureau than provincial papers knowing that much of it could be collected by hand often within hours. Provincial editors did of course submit items to the Bureau, - articles rather than news items which, particularly if locally orientated, tended to be published without reference to the Bureau. In this respect the Fleet Street press was at a disadvantage and because provincial censorship offices were never established, the issue festered nicely in Fleet Street for the duration of the war. The provincial newspapers themselves felt aggrieved when even lesser fry than themselves evaded the censorship instructions. Commenting on a detailed description of a Zeppelin raid which had appeared in Ware Parish Magazine, the editor of the Hertfordshire Mercury wrote to the Bureau 'prompted...by a feeling of soreness that restrictions placed upon us ...which were loyally and conscientiously complied with much to the mystification of our readers...should...be rendered useless through others evading or ignoring them'.[17].

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16. Riddell to Swettenham, 21st October 1915, P.R.O. Ho 139/10/12.
17. Hertfordshire Mercury to Press Bureau, 3rd November 1915, P.R.O. HO 139/22/A894/7.

The journal Land and Water complained bitterly to the Bureau on 20th September 1916 about the stopping of an article by Arthur Pollen which alleged that serious design faults had contributed to the sinking of three British battlecruisers at Jutland whereas Pollen's allegations had already been passed by the Bureau and published in the Daily Mail and the Daily News. Brownrigg wrote an unhelpful minute to the Bureau for reply to Land and Water stating that it was always possible to stop re-publication of articles by the same author on the grounds that it was preventing the repetition of 'undesirable information'.[18] The ease with which many of Repington's despatches and articles avoided normal censorship procedure while Sir John French was Commander-in-Chief was deeply resented by commercial rivals of The Times. Shortly after the publication of Repington's despatch alleging grave shortages of high explosive shells, Spender, editor of the Westminster Gazette wrote angrily to the Bureau that Repington's article 'appears on the face of it to contravene every principle which has been laid down for military censorship. If it is true, it must be of value to the enemy...if a statement of this kind is allowed to one paper and not to others (how) can it be expected that the Press generally will regard the Censorship as an impartial and even handed institution...'[19]

With a more logical system, operated more intelligently such charges of unfairness could have been avoided. Less avoidable were the inefficiencies of a system - delays to cablegrams and material voluntarily submitted - caused by the perpetual referral of items to the departments, all of which vitally affected a newspaper's commercial competitiveness. Over delays there were spasmodic outbursts of annoyance, generally when it was discovered by an editor that a rival had beaten him to a story. Blumenfeld of the Daily Express complained to Buckmaster on 29th of September 1914 that a telegram from Antwerp had been delayed for an hour thus missing the early edition. Buckmaster remonstrated that one hour 'is not

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18. Brownrigg to Press Bureau, 21st September 1916, P.R.O. HO.139/13/A466/8.

19. Spender to Press Bureau, 15th May 1915, P.R.O. HO 139/5/A127/Part 2/30.

an excessive delay in an office in which many articles have to be dealt with'[20]. In reply to this Blumenfeld revealed what had really upset him : 'I had been told that it was because a Times column proof had had "to be gone through"'[21]. Reuters complained on 30th January 1917 about a delay to a telegram from Cairo about the Turkish occupation of Katia 'which has placed us in a grave disadvantage in comparison with our competitors... meanwhile the whole of this dispatch appeared in The Times'.[22]

Editors were remarkably tolerant over the issue of delayed cablegrams and decisions (much to the amazement of the Directors of the Press Bureau) considering the havoc they caused in meeting deadlines. It was as if they had collectively and quite spontaneously resigned themselves to the inevitable, allowing themselves only the ocassional flash of annoyance or as in the case of Northcliffe's Weekly Dispatch a sarcastic jibe : 'What blunderers our Censors are! An article submitted to them on Friday of last week was "not passed for publication" until Wednesday!.(25th November 1917). The importance of time for newspapers was never fully appreciated by the departments and not by the Bureau at first as we have seen from Buckmaster's response to Blumenfeld. It was difficult for example for the Bureau to get decisions for editors after six in the evening because the departments tended to keep normal office hours despite the war and despite a N.P.A. protest of January 1915 which pointed out that 'many editors perform the most important part of their duties between six p.m. and 2 a.m.'[23] It was a failure to understand the technicalities of

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20. Buckmaster to Blumenfeld, 5th October 1914. P.R.O. HO 139/9/A348/Part 1/5.

21. Blumenfeld to Buckmaster, 8th October 1914, ibid.

22. Reuters to Press Bureau, P.R.O. HO 139/14/A572/Part 12/7.

23. N.P.A. to Press Bureau, 16th June 1915, P.R.O. HO 130/10/6. Such complaints went on throughout the war. On the 29th of March 1916, Riddell complained that there were no naval censors on duty the previous evening, a charge hotly denied by Sir Seymour Fortescue the Chief Naval Censor at the Bureau who regarded them as tantamount to accusations of being absent without leave : 'We...are getting quite used to (such) attacks by the myrmidons of the press (which) ..are distinguished by an unerring disregard for the truth' (the telegram in dispute had in fact been delayed at the Admiralty), ibid.

of producing newspapers which often infuriated editors. The Bureau for instance did not appreciate - until it was pointed out by Reynolds's Newspaper on 11th April 1915 - that placing a 'Monday only' stamp on a press item put the Sunday press at a distinct disadvantage.

Given the volume of work involved, it was difficult for the Bureau to provide individual explanations for censorship decisions but there is little evidence that any serious thought was given to this aspect of its work until 1917. A leader in the Evening News for 28th September 1915 was representative of the views expressed in many newspapers that 'The Press does not know in nine cases out of ten why the publication of certain news is prohibited. Sometimes the censor unbends sufficiently to inform the victims of his operation; more often his line of thought appears to be beyond human understanding...being an ingenious body, the Press could often 'defeat' the Censor without any risk of being shot at dawn, but it doesn't try because that is not the game. After all the people we want to defeat are our enemies'. But it was not until Lloyd George's War Cabinet wanted editors on their side over the stopping of the large number of cablegrams from Russia containing Bolshevik propaganda, that an arrangement was devised whereby editors could make weekly visits to the Bureau to examine censored material.[24]

All the blunders and inconveniences could have been borne easier by journalists if they had believed that the press censorship was worthwhile in the national interest. But as early as the Autumn of 1914 there emerged a clear consensus in the press which regarded the Bureau's activities as a menace to the war effort - a belief shared for example by both sides in the controversy over conscription. Its very existence, it was argued, led to the impression both at home and abroad that things were being covered up which in turn had

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24. From 30th October 1917 each newspaper and news agency was supplied with a list of stopped telegrams which could be examined 'provided not less than seven and not more than fourteen days' had elapsed but the contents were 'not to be disclosed or used in any way whatever'. P.R.O. HO139/27/Part 6/383.

a detrimental effect on recruitment, home morale and neutral opinion. A letter from the pro-conscriptionist Viscount Milner in The Times on 5th September 1914 and eagerly publicised in Northcliffe's other London papers, was an early but significant barometer of the way many journalists came to regard the censorship : 'there can be no doubt that there is a daily increasing dissatisfaction at the scantiness of news vouchsafed to the public and it is doing harm'.

Led by Northcliffe's papers, there was beginning in November and December 1914 an almost daily barrage of leaders associating the failures of the censorship with the risk to recruiting and home morale. 'More News Will Bring/More Recruits' headlined the Evening News on 12th November 1914 followed by a leader which declared that many public figures had been expressing 'general discontent with the policy of secrecy which extends to the suppression of news that would not be worth a brass farthing to the enemy but would be of enormous value to the recruiting campaign...we report what all our M.P.'s must know - that reform of the Censorship is the best remedy for slack recruiting - stale official news, tedious reports of trivialities, long intervals of silence and total failure to give the country the chronicle of its Army's magnificent work - these bewilder and disgust the people.' The Times argued on the 15th of December 1914, that a 'grandmotherly system' of dealing with the news attacked the good sense and virility of the nation undermining its sense of purpose and by implication its recognition of the need for conscription. On the other hand the Liberal Daily News on 30th November 1914 called for '...an understanding of national psychology' in the operation of the censorship rather than a policy of timid concealment which only did harm to the principle of voluntary enlistment. A letter from Chas. Harrison, Chairman of the National Union of Brewery Workers made much the same point, albeit more forcefully, on the front page of the Evening News on 30th October 1915. Harrison expressed his opposition to the idea of conscription but if it was to be introduced 'the censorship will be to blame...the stupid censorship will be responsible for the murder of many of our members. And of course this applies with equal force to the members of other trade unions'. The banning of soldiers letters from the front was seen as

particularly harmful to the voluntary service scheme, the reason for which being regarded by many newspapers as 'entirely illusory'. (Reynolds's Newspaper, 10th October 1915).

As for the effect on foreign opinion, the New. Statesman, like many newspapers, believed that the censorship 'has persistently lowered our prestige abroad...'(23rd October 1915). The Times regularly featured criticism of the British censorship which had been made abroad particularly in the United States. After a few months of war, the paper's Washington correspondent sent a despatch published on the 8th of October 1914 which in traditional Times manner sought to give the government some guidance ; 'One of the worst features of the war', it declared, 'is the evil influence of a blind censorship. England and France alike must know that if they desire to promote and stimulate a belief in foreign lands of their combined power, the suppression of information is a poor policy'. It was advice which in the opinion of the Daily Mail the British government steadfastly ignored to its cost. A leader on 10th October 1915 was certain that 'after fifteen months of experience with censorship, nothing has done more to lower our reputation abroad for honesty and good sense...' Having an official press censorship certainly exposed the British government to the charge of keeping back information from its own people and also, in view of London's position at the centre of the world's telegraphic network, to the charge that international telegrams for onward transmission, particularly from Europe to the United States, were 'doctored'. The New York Evening Post told its readers in October 1914 that the British censorship 'is plainly controlled by a desire to conceal the extent of German successes, to blacken the enemy's character as much as possible and generally to win public opinion in the States by fair means or foul'.

'Truth', said William Randolph Hearst in 1916, 'was long ago decided by the British Press Bureau as its chief enemy' (New York Journal, 10th May 1916) and anti-British journalists like him took great delight

in quoting British press attacks upon the Bureau. Following the banning of Hearst's newspaper syndicate from using the British international cable via London on 10th October 1916,[25] his New York American ran a double column leader on 12th October 1916 which devoted much of its space to extensive quotations from The Times. Daily Mail, Daily News, and Pall Mall Gazette all sharply critical of the Press Bureau's performance. 'Ask any Englishman', Northcliffe was quoted 'what branch of Government deserves first prize for incompetence, stupidity and unparalleled capacity for making blunders and he will unhesitantly name the Press Bureau. In a veritable army of muddlers the British censor...has remained champion .... Londoners know less of the war than New Yorkers....' (a characteristic Northcliffe exaggeration).

By the 20th of November 1915 The Times had come to the conclusion that the press censorship had become'incorrigibly inefficient' and most of Fleet Street and the provincial press would have concurred. They had all experienced delays to telegrams, unfair treatment, seen material passed which they said they would not have published and they had all observed the growth of an institution which none of them had expected would interfere so thoroughly with the commercial running of their paper. But what rubbed salt into all these wounds was what they regarded as the failure of the authorities to recognize that from the outset of the war they had proved to be quite capable, like all professional journalists, of censoring their own material 'in the national interest'. The Irish Times had earlier made the point, that had those in authority, particularly at the Press Bureau, 'been more intimately acquainted with the working of the Press ' they would have realised that 'competent editors would be quite sure to use their discretion in such a way that nothing of importance should be revealed to the enemy'. It pointed to a case where 'the description of the tactics employed by the Indian troops in conducting their attacks upon the enemy trenches would not have been published, we believe, had the responsibility been left with the newspaper editors' (7th December 1914).

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25. P.R.O. HO 139/28/A1057/Part 1.

On 9th February 1915 the London Times went to the heart of this press grievance : 'In all essentials', said a leader almost certainly written by Dawson the editor, 'the standard of censorship imposed by newspapers themselves is infinitely higher than that of the Press Bureau (and) there is much force in the view, which is by no means confined to the Press, that the work of censorship might better have been left to the newspapers themselves - with the assistance of a strong Government commission completely furnished with all the official news and plans for reference in doubtful cases'. Sir. Loe Strachey made the same point in The Spectator later that year : 'On the general principle of censorship we would simply say that we doubt the efficacy in the majority of cases. It is a very clumsy instrument. We are tempted to fancy sometimes that we should be in no greater danger if there was no Press Censorship at all' (13th November 1915). Lord Morley, himself a former distinguished journalist, observed in the House of Lords on 3rd November 1915 that he had 'never seen...an Administration in less need of a censored Press...I have never seen a Government more tenderly handled'[26] and Lord Curzon acknowledged on the 8th of November, that 'having invited the Press to be the censors of the Press...looking back...this is an appeal which we (the Government) have not addressed in vain'.[27] What all these commentators were in effect acknowledging was the degree of self-censorship observed by most newspapers during the war.

Self-censorship is a constant ethical problem for journalists. During the First World War, editors and proprietors, recipients of a perpetual flow of official 'guidance', faced daily not only the problem of what to put in or leave out of their newspapers but also the additional burden of how to interpret events 'in the national interest'. It was a problem made more agonising for a proprietor like Northcliffe, possessing a megalomanic belief in the power and

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26. House of Lords Debates, 5th Series, 3rd November 1915, Col. 128.

27. House of Lords Debates, 5th Series, 8th November 1915, Col.203.

influence of his papers upon public opinion. As with other aspects of press censorship, the issue had been raised well before 1914. In 1898, J.M.Maclean Unionist M.P. for Cardiff and editor proprietor of the Western Mail in a speech to the Institute of Journalists about war correspondents expressed 'surprise and uneasiness that the Press in London...had not given the facts about the present campaign in the North West frontier of India. There had been, he would not say a good deal of suppression but a great deal of silence about what had been going on...'[28]

It was because the press had ex ercised such 'a great deal of silence' over this and later campaigns in South Africa[29] that proprietors like Sir John Leng, proprietor of the Dundee Advertiser were so vehemently opposed to the proposed 1905 Press Bill for control of the press in war-time. Such a Bill was unnecessary, argued Leng because '...the discreet and patriotic withholding of news if exercised by a free press (is) a sphere where perfect freedom is by experience proved to be for the public good'.[30] There were other journalists like Sidney Brooks who as we have seen in Chapter 1 did not believe that their fellow journalists were capable of the kind of patriotic discretion which people like Sir John Leng claimed for them. According to Brooks 'Trusting to the "patriotism" or "good feeling" (of the press)...is an inadequate safeguard, because patriotism ..would have to be backed up by omniscience'(Pall Mall Gazette, 27th July 1912). But Brooks was wrong about the voluntary system which worked effectively and discreetly and he was wrong about the degree of self-imposed censorship which journalists were capable of. From the most prestigious to the most lowly of the profession, journalists at the outbreak of the war became ultra patriots often

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28. Cited in the Fortnightly Review, April 1898.

29. The Cornhill Magazine in March 1915 referred to a request made to the press during the Boer War to keep quiet about General Robert's plans for an advance on Blomfontein : 'and to our credit for we really are quite a patriotic lot when we are not thinking of how to go one better than our competitors - we did lie low over the details of Robert's concentrations'.

30. Leng, 'Open Letter to the Press', April 1906, P.R.O. Cab. 17/91.

subordinating their professional judgements and interests to what they regarded as the overriding interests of the state. As Dawson wrote to F.E. Smith on 27th August 1914 : 'Let me point out to you... that The Times and I do not doubt other newspapers have been daily supplementing the work of the Press Bureau by censorship undertaken on their own account. We are continuously receiving information sometimes passed by the Censor, which it is not in the national interest to publish'.[31]

Dawson's claim to Smith was openly and frequently admitted in the leader columns of his paper. In a leader of 4th November 1915 The Times commenting on a House of Lords debate about the censorship, argued that 'the plain truth is that in the matter of giving information to the enemy, the newspapers are far more cautious than the Press Bureau ...we ourselves and we doubt not other newspapers act habitually as our own censors...' Dawson was as good as his word. At the time of writing that leader, he was busy with his blue pencil hacking away for example at many of the pieces critical of the High Command sent to him by Repington, The Times military correspondent.Repington frequently complained to The Times office about editorial interference with his articles. In a letter to Freeman (Dawson's deputy as night editor) on 9th October 1916 referring to an article on the 'War Situation', Repington complained that'it has been described as "uncensored" yet partsof my MSS are omitted'.[32] A little later in the month Repington felt obliged to circulate a secret internal memorandum to the Times editorial staff entitled 'The Real Situation' as 'I am prevented from expressing my real opinion in The Times'. (The 'real situation', in Repington's opinion was the continual political interference in the military conduct of the war; he had earlier written an article attacking Lloyd George for having 'forced Geddes upon Haig...', which Freeman had returned unpublished because Freeman believed 'that its insertion was not desirable'[33]).

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31. Dawson to Smith, P.R.O. HO 139/5/A127/Part 2.

32. Repington to Freeman, 'Repington', MSS. The Times Archives.

33. Freeman to Repington, 11th October 1916, ibid. The Times, was anxious at that moment to protect its favourite Minister, Lloyd George from any adverse publicity or criticism. The appointment of a civilian, Sir Eric Geddes with the acting rank of Major General to run the railways in France rankled very deeply with professional soldiers like Repington.

On the face of it, Dawson's open confession of self-censorship appears to conflict with the views taken publicly by his employer, Lord Northcliffe. The 'Napoleon of Fleet Street' portrayed himself as the champion of a free press, the arch enemy of any form of censorship and the bitter critic of those journals alleged to be collaborating with the authorities in 'Hiding the Truth'. But Northcliffe was only too anxious to place his sources at the government's disposal and to 'hide the truth' when he saw fit 'in the national interest'. He told Lloyd George in 1916 that he had not been very impressed by what he had seen at G.H.Q. while on a visit there in September 1914 nor by what he described to Lloyd George as '...the disgraceful waste of life at Loos'.[34] But readers of his newspapers read nothing of these misgivings. The war correspondents Keith Murdoch and Ellis Ashmead Bartlett both informed him of what they regarded as the appaling military situation in the Dardanelles. Northcliffe arranged for them to see Lloyd George but as he told Balfour he thought 'it wise not to discuss the disastrous Dardanelles expedition in my newspapers'.[35]

In fairness to Northcliffe, because he was looked upon as the most powerful and influential press proprietor of his day, people confided scandals and revealed shortcomings to him which he genuinely considered would, in many instances, have done grave damage to military or naval operations, if published. He told Curzon in June 1915 of 'letters we are getting from the front in regard to the horrors that have taken place owing to the lack of explosives; there are many revelations concerning shocking lack of preparations of what are called Kitchener's Armies at home. ...there is a vast

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34. Northcliffe to Lloyd George, 6th August 1916, Lloyd George Papers, E/2/21/1. House of Lords Record Office.

35. Pound and Harmsworth, op. cit. (1952) p. 484. His papers of course published news items about the Gallipoli venture but these were clearly kept to a minimum.

shortage of rifles and practically no machine guns or arms for practice...I do not publish this matter as it might be valuable information for the Germans..'[36]

Northcliffe instinctively disliked any form of censorship, official, voluntary or self-imposed because it compromised his independence as a journalist and often left him with a feeling of having been used. As he told Churchill in 1912 when, at the start of the pre-war voluntary scheme, he had held back news of a German Naval scheme at the request of the British Ambassador in Berlin, : 'I do not like doing this sort of thing and I consider an Ambassador takes a great responsibility upon himself in making such a request. These same Ambassadors and Foreign Ministers are the people who, while they make use of the Press as a sort of doormat, are always talking of its dangerous tendency etc. etc. etc.'[37] But he went on suppressing material throughout the war as much on his own initiative as by official request. Writing to Balfour on 11th July 1915 he referred to having visited France the previous Easter where he had become aware 'of certain scandals in connection with the Royal Naval Air Services. The perpetual washing of dirty linen in public is not a grateful task and I have carefully refrained from even hinting at what I know in any of my papers, hoping against hope that improvements would be made'.[38]

Northcliffe did more than most public figures to foster an image of the army and its General Staff as a super fighting machine, 'an organization' as he told Lloyd George in 1916, which was 'well nigh as perfect as it can be'[39] headed as the Daily Mail put it on 13th October 1916 by 'two of the most capable soldiers whom Britain has produced for many years'. By February 1918 Northcliffe was holding a far more critical opinion of the performance of the army and the

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36. Northcliffe to Balfour, 11th July 1915, Northcliffe MSS, Dep. 4908, 'Balfour', British Library. The drastic fall in the Daily Mail's circulation figures following Northcliffe's attack on Kitchener may well have also had something to do with his decision.

37. Northcliffe to Churchill, 1st March 1912, Northcliffe MSS, Vol. IV. British Library.

38. Northcliffe to Balfour, 11th July 1915., ibid., Vol I. He was referring to heavy losses incurred by the R.N.A.S. at Dunkirk.

39. Northcliffe to Lloyd George, 1st August 1916, ibid., Vol V.

quality of its general staff. Writing to his neighbour Lord Rosebery in February 1918 he considered that 'with the exception of a Division under Sir Montague Harper and Plummer's Army, our losses from sheer ignorance on the part of those who issue orders are appaling... our losses last year make up a shocking tale. I should not like to say how many men were uselessly thrown away at Passchendaele and Cambrai. Unless you actually see the blunders as I have done, it is incredible that they should have been committed. Is it believable that sane men would send masses of metal weighing 30 tons into the mud at Ypres. The tank experts warned the Commanders of what would happen to those invaluable weapons of war if they persisted'.[40] But apart from a few short, sharp outbursts by Lovat Fraser in the Daily Mail critical of the High Command, Northcliffe's papers continued throughout this period of the war to present the army as the ultimate in military efficiency and to find a vast range of excuses to account for the lack of success. On 9th January 1918 a news story in the Daily Mail described Haig's account of military operations for 1917 as containing 'a spirit of high confidence throughout'. A leader headed 'Haig Pushes/And Why They Were Not/Decisive' considered that the reason why Germany had not been crushed is the fault 'not of the British staff (nor) the British generals but factors over which they could excercise no control' - such as the Russian Revolution, the French offensive not being 'the decisive action' hoped for and 'last but not least the weather (which) was uniformly hostile. Not Hindenburg's Germans but rain deprived us of a great victory at Arras. Not Ludendorff but the mud saved the Germans at Ypres'.

Dawson in his letter to Smith in August 1914 inferred that other members of his profession were also in the habit of wielding the censor's blue pencil on their own account and there is plenty of evidence to support this assertion with several of Lloyd George's press friends providing some vivid examples C.P. Scott, editor of the Manchester

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40. Northcliffe to Rosebery, 12th February 1918, Northcliffe MSS. 'Rosebery' Vol. II British Library.

Guardian was a close confidant of Lloyd George and other senior members of the war-time governments but he assiduously suppressed much of the often controversial and head-line making news that came his way. He did this so thoroughly that his staff were often incensed to discover that they had been scooped on stories that Scott had been aware of for days. Over breakfast with Lloyd George on 27th November 1914 Scott learnt of Lloyd George and Admiral Fisher's grave disquiet over recent Admiralty failures in the South Atlantic and particularly over the performance of the Mediterranean Fleet from whose clutches in October 1914 the German battlecruisers 'Goeben' and 'Breslau' had escaped through the Straits of Messina to Constantinople, where they played a crucial role in 'persuading' Turkey to join the Central Powers. Lloyd George informed Scott that he believed there had been 'a society job'[41] to protect the Commander of the Mediterranean Fleet, Sir Berkeley Milne, from facing court martial. Not only was there no hint of all this in the Manchester Guardian but a leader on 28th November 1914 argued strongly that these questions (the loss of Admiral Craddock's squadron in the South Atlantic and the escaped German battlecruisers) will be publicly thrashed out in time but the right time is not now'.

On 13th October 1915 Scott wrote to L.T. Hobhouse, the London editor of the Guardian that 'a wounded man - an educated corporal just back from Loos sends a letter to us - too damaging for publication - from which it appears that in that engagement we shelled our own men'[42] At the time, the paper was running stories such as that of 12th October 1915 headlined : 'Germans suffered immense losses and a complete defeat'. At no stage during this period was the story from the 'educated corporal' even hinted at. Even the vague suggestion, in a leader on 2nd November commenting about Sir John French's despatch about the Loos engagement that all might not be well with the British forces was tempered with the comment that '...even our defeats, some of them, have shown finer racial qualities than all the German victories'. When Lloyd George became Prime Minister in December

41. Trevor Wilson, The Political Diaries of C.P.Scott (New York, Cornell University Press, 1970) p. 110-11.

42. ibid. P. 141.

1916 Scott naturally became privy to far more confidential information. As a frequent breakfast-table guest at 10 Downing Street he periodically heard Lloyd George 'enlarging on the stupidity of the soldier...including Haig' and of how in the Prime Minister's opinion, 'all the men who had made reputations in the War were civilian or civilian-trained'.[43] No hint of these views, even at the time of Robertson's 'resignation' as C.I.G.S. in February 1918 when Scott had early notice that Robertson was to be replaced by Wilson, ever leaked as far as Manchester.

Another press figure in almost daily and intimate contact with Lloyd George and other senior politicians and officials was Sir George Riddell, Secretary of the N.P.A. and chief proprietor of the News of the World. He heard from Lloyd George of the 'very bad' arrangement for the supply of shells as early as October 1914; he learnt from journalist Stephen Graham in February 1915'a gloomy account of the Russian prospects in the East'; he himself told Sir Reginald Brade, Permanent Secretary at the War Office, on the 17th of March 1915 that 'the man in the street does not know the real facts regarding Neuve Chapelle' and like Scott, Riddell often heard of Lloyd George's low opinion of the generals, of how they lacked vision and of how the civilians, according to Lloyd George, 'have been too easily led by the soldiers' as a result of which 'all these great offensives have been failures and...many glorious lives have been sacrificed'. After a visit to Verdun in September 1916 Lloyd George told Riddell that 'the public know only half the story. They read of the victories; the cost is concealed'[44]

But Riddell kept these facts and opinions to himself during the war and appeared to have passed nothing on to his editor, Elmsley Carr. While it was admitted in The News of the World on the 21st of February that Russia had suffered a setback in the fight for Prussia, readers were told,(despite Stephen Graham's information to the proprietor) that 'there is nothing to indicate that the 'German

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43. Wilson, op. cit., (1970) P. 297.

44. Riddell, op. cit. (1933), p. 33, p.65; pp.207-8, 218.

Victory "reported in Berlin is nothing more than a circumstantial fiction of the kind that has made German war news notorious'. On 21st March 1915, a few days after Riddell's conversation with Brade, readers of his paper learnt that 'As fuller...accounts of the battle of Neuve Chapelle become available the action grows in brilliancy and importance. When the moment for hand to hand fighting came some of the Germans were only able to drag themselves to their knees begging for mercy'. While he heard Lloyd George castigating the Generals and questioning the strategic usefulness of the offensives, Riddell's newspaper reminded its readers that 'We must trust our Generals and not be impatient,' (26th September 1915) and that as far as the offensives were concerned '...the only gospel the Germans respect is the gospel of the sword and with heavy blows its doctrine is being heavily exploited by the Allied troops...' (26th August 1916 at the time of the Somme offensive).

Right wing editors like Garvin, Blumenfeld and St. Loe Strachey, too old for active service, had a strong desire to 'do their bit' for the country and the element of patriotic 'sacrifice' was a powerful motive for them when it came to censoring their own material. Strachey told his readers as early as August 1914, shortly before the announcement of the landing of the British Expeditionary Force in France that 'the press...an enormous existing power for good or evil...has been given its opportunity of self suppression and has used it nobly'. (The Spectator 15th August 1914). They seemed to believe that they had a public duty in war-time to suppress any form of criticism or report which reflected badly on the efficiency, integrity or strategic conceptions of the senior commanders in the armed forces. This 'protection' took on an extremely partisan form during 1915 when, with dead-lock on the Western Front, press support for 'side shows' in the Dardanelles and Salonika, (sponsored by the former 'Radicals' Lloyd George and Churchill), gathered momentum. Strachey told Haig in December 1915 that he had been busy countering the doubts being expressed in the press about the viability of the Western Front strategy and that he could '...well understand how sick soldiers must be of us journalists. When I look back upon the record of my profession I am bound to say it is a sorry one..journalists have failed to get the public to

realise that as a general rule nothing is more futile than to judge by bare success'.[45]

Strachey wrote to Haig on 27th October 1916 again apologizing as a journalist for press comments which had suggested that the Somme offensive had been a failure and had led to enormous and unnecessary losses. 'There are', he wrote to Haig 'the beginnings of a most dangerous thing here, an attempt to work on people's feelings in regard to casualties and to ask whether they are really worthwhile. That of course is ruin and therefore I thought the best thing was stamp upon it at once'.[46] Strachey had already earned Haig's gratitude for an article in The Spectator for 26th August 1916, 'The Bedrock of War', in which Strachey defended the Western Front offensive strategy and urged the nation not to listen 'to people whose nerve gives way..let them (the British people) remember that their duty is not to flinch and not to embarrass the Commander-in-Chief by cries of "This slaughter is more than we can endure" but to make up their minds to see the thing through whatever it costs in tears, blood, human anguish...' In May 1918 Strachey carried self-censorship in the interests of senior military personnel to the point of completely censoring any account of the Maurice debate, a Lloyd George tour de force in which the Prime Minister totally (but falsely) discredited the former Director of Military Operations, Sir Frederick Maurice who had accused Lloyd George of lying over the number of troops under Haig's command on the Western Front at the beginning of 1918. Strachey assured Maurice on 10th May 1918 that 'This Saturday's paper will have nothing about the Debate'.[47]

R.D.Blumenfeld, editor of the Daily Express was also aware like Riddell as early as October 1914 that the British forces in France were facing a serious shortage of shells. Blumenfeld learnt this from an old friend and regular correspondent, Major General later Field

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45. Strachey to Haig, 31st December 1915. Strachey Papers, S/8/1/1. House of Lords Record Office.
46. Strachey to Haig, Strachey Papers, S/8/1/3. ibid.
47. Strachey to Maurice, Strachey Papers, S/10/8/2. ibid.

Marshal Sir Julian Byng but he published nothing in his paper about it at the time.[48] Like many other editors during the war, Blumenfeld placed rabid patriotism before the pusuit of objective journalism. As editor of the most stridently jingoistic newspaper of the period, it didn't suit him to use the information about shell shortages until it could be used as a club to beat about the head of the Liberal Administration and about Lord Haldane's head in particular who was blamed by the Express for having 'cut down' on the establishment at Woolwich thus causing current shell shortages. (Daily Express,5th December 1914). Like Strachey,Blumenfeld was anxious that nothing should appear in the press which reflected adversely on the courage or enterprise of the British forces and their commanders. He did not, for example use information sent to him from France in November 1916 about troops of the 21st Division on the Somme who had abandoned their packs and of other units getting 'tight on a cask of rum'.[49] Nor did he use or to judge from the tone of his leaders, appear in any way affected by the information and opinions he was receiving privately from Ashmead Bartlett in September, 1917 about 'These d-optimist generals who live in French chateaux..men, with few exceptions...of the most indifferent intellect who...have succeeded in the last five months in killing, permamently wounding and maiming 21,727 Officers, and 344,614 N.C.O's (and)...have hardly moved the Hun an inch'.[50]Blumenfeld later described Ashmead Bartlett as 'clever and outspoken but not always discreet...he fell foul of the authorities at the Dardanelles and made no end of a fuss in his letters home'.[51]

But Blumenfeld did take notice and act when senior army officers wrote letters home making 'no end of a fuss' as did General Charteris, Haig's senior Intelligence Officer on 30th December 1917 urging Blumenfeld

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48. Major General Sir Julian Byng to Blumenfeld, 28th October 1914, Blumenfeld Papers. By 1-46. House of Lords Record Office.

49. T.H. Buck to Blumenfeld, 21st November 1916, ibid.

50. Cited in R.D. Blumenfeld, R.D.B's Procession (London, Nicholson & Co., 1935) pp.305-6.

51. ibid.

to discount rumours that staff changes at G.H.Q. (including his own dismissal) had any 'connection direct or indirect with the Cambrai show... my departure is not at the request or the desire of either the C-in-C or my immediate superior officers-very much the reverse'[52] Blumenfeld duly obliged on this occasion with a front page story in January 1918 headed 'The Rumours of Cambrai/No One Sent Home/Greatest Killing of the War' in which it was stated that 'The Daily Express understands that no one has been ungummed and no one is likely to be...(at Cambrai) we killed more Germans and wounded more men than the Germans ever lost on one day on the Western Front...our machine gunners were physically sick of the killing...the recent changes at G.H.Q. have nothing to do with the Cambrai affair'.

The difficulties facing editors over the issue of self-censorship were well described by Garvin of The Observer in a letter to his son Gerald, later killed on the Somme. Garvin complained on 22nd October 1915 that 'my job is exceedingly difficult. If one speaks out, it is an unpleasant and thankless task apt to be misunderstood by the blissfully ignorant, never can one speak out plain enough without risk of causing more disquiet than understanding. If one is reassuring and talks like Pangloss whatever happens, one simply encourages fatheads in delusion and even statesmen in inadequacy. To hit the point of stimulating without disorganizing and getting action forward without shaking nerves...is an extraordinary tax on judgement...'[53] Such a view helps to explain why Garvin said nothing about the submarine menace which as he learnt from Fisher in February 1915 was 'a bit more serious than is officially pretended'.[54]

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52. Charteris to Blumenfeld, Blumenfeld Papers, Char/1-2, House of Lords Record Office.

53. J.L. Garvin to Gerald Garvin, 22nd October 1915, Garvin Papers, Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archives, King's College, London.

54. Garvin to Gerald Garvin, 8th February 1915, ibid.

It also perhaps explains an absurdly optimistic conclusion drawn by The Observer at the end of an article about the set-back at Neuve Chapelle which described how many British troops had been held up by unbroken barbed wire, shot down by German machine guns and others had been hit by shrapnel from British artillery shells but nonetheless Neuve Chapelle was 'in spite of all this...a memorable victory'. (18th March 1915). Such attempts to 'stimulate without disorganizing' must indeed been an 'Extraordinary tax on judgement' and amply confirm Garvin's own claim made to his son in September 1915 that 'I have never given anything away... (I)...always sacrifice journalism...to the public good'.[55]

Amy Strachey,in a biography of her father made the quip that 'the way to keep a secret is to tell it to a journalist in confidence'[56] and there is clearly a problem for journalists in senior positions about how to use, if at all, the information gleaned from the inner sanctums of political power. Scott's view on the matter was very clear. He told Garvin in 1915 that 'he never dreamt of using information got in that way except as a guide to judgement ...'[57] and he was most upset when a highly placed 'source' revealed information to journalists less inclined to remain silent than himself. When such a source, Admiral Fisher, told T.P. O'Connor, proprietor of The Star what Fisher considered to be the grave naval situation facing the country, Scott records in his diary that he spent a good deal of his time on 3rd March 1916 'seeing O'Connor and pressing on him by every means in my power the obligation of a deadly secrecy as to the naval peril - a hard task for a born journalist'.[58] Also like Scott, Riddell took a dim view of those journalists or officials who broke the 'off the record' code of self-censorship. He was for example as critical of Sir John French for having collaborated with Repington in publishing the shell shortage story in 1915 as he

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55. Garvin to Gerald Garvin, Garvin Papers, (14th September 1915) op.cit.
56. Cited in John Wale, Journalism and Government, (London, Macmillan & Co., 1973) p.16.
57. Trevor Wilson, op. cit., (1970), p. 160.
58. ibid., p.102.

was of Robertson Nicoll, editor of the British Weekly for having published 'a most depressing account' of conditions in the trenches learnt from Lloyd George, publication of which Riddell considered to be most 'injudicious'.[59]

It was not just editors who felt obliged to sacrifice their professional standards for the sake of the war effort. Those journalists closest to the actual fighting, the war correspondents, particularly the five accredited to G.H.Q. on the Western Front, obliged by their undertaking to the authorities to refrain from all criticism of individual commanders or operations, carried this to the point where as one of the five, Philip Gibbs was able to write in the introduction to a reprint of his despatches in 1918 : 'There is no criticism in this book, no judgement of the actions of men, no detailed summing up of success or failure. That is not within my liberty or duty as a correspondent with the Armies in the Field'.[60]

Such discretion was the hallmark of almost all the war correspondents from the commencement of hostilities whether they had signed any official undertaking or not. The History of The Times refers with pride to the 'important negative service...that was rendered at the beginning of the war'.[61] The History of The Times was referring to the silence observed in the press about the German victory over the Russians at Tannenberg, and in particular to the self-censorship ex ercised by Gerald Campbell, The Times correspondent with the French armies in Lorraine who made no mention in his despatches of the gigantic losses sustained by the French forces there in the opening weeks of the war. According to the History of The Times 'it is impossible that Campbell can have failed to hear many details of the disastrous battle in Lorraine in which the French

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59. G.A.Riddell, op. cit. (1933) p.33.
60. Philip Gibbs, From Bapaume to Passchendaele (London, William Heinemann (1918) p.6.
61. The History of The Times , Vol IV op. cit. (1952) p. 232.

were defeated with losses of about 300,000 or nearly 25% of the combatants. No word of this, a rate of wastage never equalled in all the rest of the war, appeared in his messages to the paper nor even in his private letters to Dawson...Had it been known in England that France had lost a quarter of a million men from her regular army in the first month of the war, British determination must have been gravely weakened'.[62]

The correspondents at G.H.Q. pooled their stories each day which were then censored by military censors who lived with them, before being telegraphed to the Press Bureau for onward transmission to Fleet Street. But as Gibbs wrote shortly after the war : 'We identified ourselves absolutely with the armies in the field... there was no need of censorship of our despatches. We were our own Censors'.[63] Official briefings by staff officers who had become their friends were accepted often without question and bland innocuous stories filed for publication even at the height of the most serious engagements. Writing of his despatches about the Somme battles, one of the correspondents, W. Beach Thomas (Daily Mail/ Daily Mirror) confessed that ' I was thoroughly and deeply ashamed of what I had written for the good reason that it was untrue'.[64] Gibb's despatches about the British failure at Cambrai in 1917 are eloquent testimony of the total 'identification' with the army staff view of events at the expense of objective journalism. Enemy forces were always 'formidable' or in 'new strengths'. When on 5th December 1917 British troops who had taken Bourdon Wood on 20th November were forced to evacuate the position, the story is written up almost as a triumph of British generalship : '...the operation has been very secretly carried out...the enemy (were) thoroughly deceived...(and)...heavily bombarded and attacked empty (British) trenches' at which the British soldiers 'chuckled

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62. The History of The Times op. cit., (1952) p.345.

63. Philip Gibbs, Adventures in Journalism, (London, William Heinemann 1923). p. 231.

64. W. Beach Thomas, A Traveller in News (London, Chapman-Hall 1926), p. 164.

at this furious advance upon mythical defenders. It seemed a huge joke to our men...we left nothing behind and destroyed dug-outs and works which the enemy had built and we had occupied during the fortnight's adventure'. (Daily Telegraph/Daily Chronicle 6th December 1917).

It was not that men like Gibbs and Beach Thomas were unaware of a more realistic state of affairs at the front. A few weeks after writing that piece, Gibbs was telling an audience of journalists and politicians in London, such grim stories of 'what the war in the West really means' that his audience, as C.P. Scott noted in his diary were 'strongly affected'.[65] Lloyd George who was present was so upset at what he heard of 'generals...absolutely callous as to the gigantic casualities, ordering splendid men...to do perfectly impossible things, such as to advance against uncut wire with enfilading machine gun fire' that he told Scott 'I can't go on with this bloody business...I would rather resign'.[66] But none of this realism appeared in the war correspondents' despatches because had it done so and had their despatches managed to avoid the censorship, they believed, with some justification that British morale at home and at the front would have been seriously jeopardized. Like their editors and the majority of their fellow journalists, they believed that in the short term, defeat of the Germans was more important than truthful journalism. Indeed it was a complaint of Swinton, (Eye Witness) that editors at home were so concerned that his reports from the front should not shock or depress his readers that 'in addition to what was cut out by the censors, the papers frequently omitted portions of what I had written', for fear that some of his descriptions of the fighting 'being too strong meat for the public'.[67]

There was also present in the correspondents' minds the vexed question of newspaper rivalry. They had been sent out by their papers to write descriptive pieces in a racy, professional manner which

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65. Trevor Wilson, op. cit. (1920) p. 324.
66. ibid.
67. Swinton, op. cit, (1935) p.87/8.

sold newspapers. Had they clashed with the censor and been sent home they had been made aware that their papers could not have sent out a replacement which would have left their employers at a grave commercial disadvantage. While an accredited correspondent with the Allied forces at Gallipoli, Ashmead Bartlett, who was later sent home by Hamilton for sending out unauthorised messages, made a note in his diary on 9th May 1915 of some of the ethical and commercial considerations which the war correspondents were faced with : 'It is heartrending work having to write what I know to be untrue and in the end having to confine myself to give a descriptive account of the useless slaughter...for the benefit of the public at home when what I wish to do is to tell the world the blunders that are being daily committed...Yet I am helpless. Any word of criticism will be eliminated by the censor and there would be a row with headquarters rendering my position more difficult. Today I feel inclined to stop writing half truths, to resign...(but)... I have my employers to consider and all the expense they have incurred'.[68]

Editors with a tendency to censor Swinton's innocuous copy would naturally be inclined to suppress home news if they believed it might undermine the war effort. As the Glasgow Herald observed on 26th November 1914 'When the inner history of these times is written it will be found that a very great deal of the restraint and reticence shown by the newspaper press has been the outcome of a spontaneous readiness to ease the censor's responsibilities and it will also be discovered that it has applied to a much wider field of affairs than the censor himself has known to exist'. Not surprisingly the principal victims in this 'wider field' of self-censorship were the pacifist groups and individuals whose speeches and activities if reported on at all, were written up by most newspapers in a hostile and disparaging manner. When Keir Hardie asked some searching questions in the House of Commons about British diplomacy prior to the outbreak of war, the Daily Mail ran the headline : 'The British

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68. Ellis Ashmead Bartlett, The Uncensored Dardanelles (London, Hutchinson & Co. 1928), p.161.

Pro German Leader/Mr. Keir Hardie/Reveals His Colours' followed by a report which described Hardie as 'a gloomy browed man...chief of the Socialist Party, "queer Hardie" as he has been called, is an anti-militarist, pro-Zulu and lastly pro-German...he has been the advocate of almost every lost cause. Unlike his German socialist friends, he is not a patriot first and a Socialist next. German socialists are fighting for their country. He has insulted the King and honoured bomb throwing'. (Daily Mail, 28th August 1914).

Pacifist leaders like Philip Snowden often complained at public meetings about what he described as 'press lies-lies directly and lies by suppression of vital information..[69] Snowden was drawing attention in this speech to the absence of press coverage of the number of nationwide meetings being held in the Autumn of 1916 calling for a negotiated settlement. As Mrs.Snowden told an audience at Briton Ferry in South Wales on 3rd December 1916 'If it were not for the silence of the Press you would know that story (of the large number of meetings) has been repeated in every industrial centre in the country and whether our Government realises it or not, the thoughtful part of the population...is seriously considering this question'.[70] This is what disturbed Repington as well but from obviously different motives. In an entry in his diary which gives significant and unbiased support to the Snowdens' contentions, Repington noted on 12th December 1916 that 'an Intelligence Man' had told him that there were 'about one hundred peace meetings a week throughout the country and that they were not reported' (in the press).[71]

The Snowdens and other pacifists had reason to be sceptical over their press coverage. Even some socialist editors, critical enough in peace-time of the distortions and suppression of the 'capitalist' press, when faced during the war with stories of the growth of pacifist feeling, were inclined to place them firmly on

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69. 2nd December 1916, P.R.O. HO 45/10814/312987/10.
70. ibid.
71. Repington, Vol.I, op. cit. (1920) p.409.

the spike. Robert Dell, the Paris correspondent of the New Statesman, angry that his editor Clifford Sharp had done just that to a number of his stories, wrote to Sharp in November 1915 : 'I have not exaggerated French losses. They were enormous in the recent offensive : the regiment of a man of my acquaintance was reduced to 38 out of 3000.... no French government can long resist the demand for peace which is becoming too general to be disregarded in the army...'[72] Along with other British editors, the only losses Sharp was interested in were German ones. Writing at the time when he was in receipt of Dell's despatches, Sharp informed his readers on the 30th of October 1915 that 'There has been encouraging news from France this week...(German counter-attacks against the British in Artois and against the French in Champagne) 'have failed completely with losses which in some cases are known to have been immense'.

It was not just editors who believed that news of pacifist meetings should be strictly censored. A reporter for the Morning Post who had covered an I.L.P. conference in April 1915 was most upset to discover that a speech made by C.H. Norman in which Norman had blamed poor French generalship for recent Allied losses and which the reporter had censored on the spot, had been published by The New Age. He wrote indignantly to H.A. Gwynne, his editor that 'it seems to me to illustrate the evils of a censor. I suppressed it because I believed the censors would have suppressed it...'[73] When Gwynne raised the matter with the Press Bureau, he was told that the Director of Public Prosecutions had refused to act against Norman on the familiar grounds that a prosecution would entail 'giving a much wider circulation to.. mischievous and inaccurate statements'.[74]

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72. Cited in Edward S. Hymans, The New Statesman (London, Longman & Co., 1963) p.55-6.
73. Parker to Gwynne, 8th April 1915, P.R.O. HO 139/23/A911/Part 1.
74. Cook to Gwynne, 27th April 1915, ibid.

We have recorded a picture in this chapter of editors, proprietors and individual journalists ex ercising a censorship themselves over material which they considered, quite independently of any official authority, to be either too dangerous or detrimental to the war effort. It was a practice which occurred across the political spectrum from the giants of Fleet Street to the most obscure provincial journals and from the beginning to the end of the war. The Lincolnshire weekly, The Epworth Bells boasted to its readers on the 3rd of October 1914 that 'it must be owned that the British Press as a whole has behaved very well. Many items of the greatest possible interest in possession of the editors have been kept secret'. In May 1918, Robert Donald, editor of the Daily Chronicle assured the Press Bureau that 'we always censor articles ourselves before troubling you with them'.[75] It came as a surprise to many journalists and certainly to many politicians and Servicemen that the press could behave in such a patriotic or 'responsible' manner. Despite the 1912 agreement between the press and the Service Departments, when war came in 1914 Service chiefs and their political masters could not quite believe that journalists could be trusted to censor their own material or even be capable of doing so. Hence the emergence of the Press Bureau, a voluntary half-way house which left journalists confused and resentful that their patriotism had been questioned and their professionalism underrated. Given the almost inevitable blunders committed by the Bureau, it did not take long for a consensus to emerge in the press which argued that the official censorship was unnecessary and that with sufficient technical guidance the newspapers could do the whole job themselves.

P.E. Hamer, President of the National Union of Journalists, was proud to claim in a speech to his union in 1915 that journalists had only one desire during the war and that was 'to subordinate all considerations to the one purpose of serving the country'.[76] There is in Hamer's claim and in most public references by the press to

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75. Robert Donald to the Press Bureau, 17th May 1918. P.R.O. HO 139/14/A561/24.

76. Institute Journal, 30th April 1915.

self-censorship, a strong element of pride, the suggestion that by abandoning their natural instinct to 'publish and be damned' they were behaving as responsible citizens and in the process doing the nation a great service. There were some muted doubts expressed as to the ethical validity of such a posture but these were few and far between. Most journalists at home and abroad became, during the war, patriots first and journalists second. But in doing so, did they debase the coinage of objective journalism and in the words of Norman Angell make of the British press 'a more reptile instrument than Bismarck could ever hope to make'?[77] Many critics would agree with Angell and argue that had the war correspondents reported what they saw and the editors what they heard, public opinion would have forced a British government to settle for peace and many millions of lives saved from useless slaughter. The post-war mood of bitterness and disillusionment with the behaviour of the press is well caught by C.E. Montague, a former leader writer on the Manchester Guardian who was present at Ancre on the Somme in July 1916 and who recalled with savage irony in 1922 how after 'the most bloody defeat in the history of Britain... our press came out bland, copious and graphic with nothing to show that we had not had a good day - a victory really. Men who had lived through the massacre read the stuff open mouthed...Black was an aspect of white...the papers had been seen to be untrue'.[78]

Journalists like Angell and Montague were naturally bitter and shocked at what they regarded as the devaluation of truth and the ethical standards of their profession but their criticisms and those of later commentators tend to ignore the historical reality of the volatile nature of British public opinion, a luxury that war-time reporters and editors could not afford to do. They had before them the examples of public hysteria which Arthur Moore's despatch had evoked and the panic caused when rumours circulated in 1915 that Kitchener had been

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77. Norman Angell, The Press and the Organization of Society, (London, Labour Publishing Co., 1922) p.6.

78. C.E. Montague, Disenchantment, (London, Chatto & Windus, 1922) p.98.

sacked. They had to decide just how truthful an account of the war the public could stand without a severe breakdown occurring in national morale, which as ardent patriots with a passion for victory no less sincere than their readers, they had no desire to bring about. It is relatively easy in retrospect to select the likes of Philip Gibbs and Beach Thomas for condemnation for having 'written jauntily about life in the trenches (and for having) kept an inspired silence about the slaughter...'[79] But the war correspondents were aware that the entire nation scrutinized their every word and had they written of incompetence and useless slaughter and had their copy managed to avoid the field censorship, the Press Bureau's and their own office censorship, the most likely effect would have been panic, disbelief and demands for their immediate recall.

As for the editors, self-censorship although a daily routine, was never an easy task, particularly in war-time when truth and criticism could perhaps cost lives or damage to the national cause. As The History of The Times recalls : 'The editorial exclusion of anything likely to check the flow of recruits was decided upon with the greatest unwillingness as a choice between extreme evils'.[80] Believing that they exerted immense power over public opinion during the war, editors became ultra cautious, fearful that the nation's destiny could be at stake if they published material which undermined public faith in the justice and ultimate success of the national cause. Besides, as hard-headed professionals, few of them had any desire to be vilified in Parliament or see their papers burnt at the Stock Exchange to the accompaniment of a drastic fall in circulation, the penalty suffered by Northcliffe, the most independent of their number, for occasionally printing what he believed to be the truth, harmful as it might be to 'the national interest'.

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79. Philip Knightley, op. cit. (1975) pp.128-9.
80. The History of The Times , op. cit. (1952) p.129.

Underlying some of the criticism of self-censorship during the war has been the argument that a newspaper has a public duty to publish whatever it believes to be the truth concerning events of national importance. Claiming Balzac as his authority Sisley Huddleston writing in the Atlantic Monthly in November 1920 put forward the view that journalists should suppress nothing and 'tell no lies for only in that way will there be no more wars'. Olive Schreiner, writing twenty years later but in no less a mood of post-war disillusionment stated forcefully that 'a daily paper not based on an attempt to disseminate the truth is a cup of poison sent round every morning to debilitate the life of the people'.[81] But do newspapers have such moral obligations, particularly in war-time? They are not public institutions entrusted by an electorate with democratic duties to perform and it can be argued that they have every right to suppress an item they consider might be offensive to their readers or detrimental to the national interest. Lucy Salmon, goes so far as to argue that newspapers have 'the universal prerogative of selection; the public has the moral right to know whatever concerns the public welfare but it has no moral right to compel the press to be the medium through which it acquires this knowledge'.[82]

But the problem with this argument is that during the war, newspapers in Britain were the only medium through which the public could acquire information concerning the 'public welfare' and with the formation of the Coalition Government in May 1915 they were also the only voice of public criticism. In these circumstances there was a moral duty on the press to provide as accurate and critical account of events as possible. By cooperating so thoroughly with the official censorship and by administering a censorship on their own account, British newspapers failed to carry out their moral obligations to the nation

81. Cited in Wilson Harris, The Daily Press (Cambridge University Press, 1943) p.12.

82. Salmon, The Newspaper and the Historian, op. cit., (1923) p.448.

believing with some justification that by so doing they were contributing immensely to the successful sustaining of the British war effort. The cost to the journalistic profession was its post-war credibility and international reputation for integrity and truthfulness, which at the time seemed a small price to pay when thousands of men, some of them colleagues, were daily paying a much larger price in the name of truth and freedom.

CHAPTER VII

Conclusion

' "The meaning of words had no longer the same relation to things but was changed by men as they thought proper" '. Thucydides, cited by C.E. Montague in 'Would Truth or Lies Cost More?' in Nineteenth Century And After, July 1921.

Press censorship did not vanish from the scene the moment hostilities ceased in November 1918. The Bureau's staff were very keen to lay down their pencils but were instructed by the War Cabinet to remain at their posts keeping a watchful eye in particular over the news and propaganda emanating from Bolshevik Russia. But by 16th December 1918 the Bureau reported that there had been a drastic fall in the number of items submitted and on 10th January 1919 Swettenham, in a memorandum to the Home Office made the point more forcefully: '...the justification for our continued existence was to prevent the spread of Bolshevik propaganda (but) the situation has changed considerably...Bolshevism is (now) so discredited and the results of the recent election have shown so clearly the sensible view taken by the people of this country that we doubt whether propaganda on this subject can do real harm here...the directors work has become a sinecure'.[1] Faced with such a strong demand for unemployment the Home Office recommended to the War Cabinet that the Bureau cease operations from 30th April 1919. This was immediately opposed by the War Office who wanted the Bureau to continue to censor items about the British forces operating in Russia but the Cabinet overruled the War Office and on 2nd April 1919 the Press Bureau 'Fitly enough announced its own approaching demise'. (Liverpool Daily Post, 3rd April 1919).

Press reaction to the closure announcement was characteristically diverse but almost universally critical of the war-time censorship and of the role played by the Bureau. The Daily Mail for example

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1. Swettenham to Harris, Home Office, 10th January 1919, P.R.O. HO 139/37/A1674/Part 1/1.

thought it a great pity that April the 1st had not been the day chosen to make the announcement and went on to voice the familiar complaint that 'when the Press Bureau was started we were told that there would be a stream of authoritative information to the Press. It has actually been a voice pipe for the Departments, big and little' (3rd April 1919). Although the Bureau had been called into existence primarily to replace the pre-war Joint Committee as an official guide for the operation of voluntary press censorship, this was not fully appreciated at first by the press which regarded it as an embryonic Ministry of Information which would assist them in promoting the national cause. When it became clear to editors that the Bureau would be a mouthpiece of departmental censorship rather than an agent of propaganda, the full force of their resentment against officialdom's distrust of the press was launched against it.

But it should not be inferred from the Daily Mail's comments that in the words of A.J.P. Taylor '...the newspapers contained no news'.[2] This is not true. The newspapers throughout the war were full of military information about the war obtained from the international press and from a small army of free-lance correspondents - a lot of it exaggerated, optimistic and censored by the cable censors but nonetheless news and lots of it. The newspapers were never totally dependent on the often sparse official paragraphs issued by the various G.H.Q.'s through the Press Bureau, to fill their pages. Nor were they particularly deprived of news by cable censorship for they employed military experts like Repington, Colonel A.M. Murray and L. Cornford Cope whose interpretations and opinions in 'filling out' the official pronouncements in extensive articles, often accompanied with detailed and accurate maps, were never shackled by any officially imposed censorship .Newspapers claimed they were starved of news because they did not like the delays to cablegrams, inevitable in any system of cable censorship. But more importantly they made the claim because they did not like paying free-lance correspondents and foreign news agencies for news, when they had, for the early part of the war, staff correspondents kicking their heels in Fleet

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2. A.J.P. Taylor, The First World War, op. cit., (1963), P.56.

Street unable to go to the front because of the ban on war correspondents. Taylor argues that it was typical of the rigid censorship that 'The British were not told that the expeditionary force were retreating from Mons'.[3] But it was through the enterprise of one of these free-lance correspondents that the British did learn almost immediately about this retreat, with the active connivance of the official censorship, even though the British public refused at first to believe it.

The Manchester Guardian like the Daily Mail recognized that in criticizing the censorship in 1919 it was necessary to go beyond the Press Bureau to the Service and other government departments for as its leader of the 3rd of April 1919 stated, the Bureau 'was often blamed for the misdeeds of others for it was but a humble instrument in the hands of departments which laid down rules for it. It is not, therefore, the Press Bureau that deserves to be criticised as the censorship in general which did much harm by hampering free discussions and suppressing information which publicity could only have done good'. The Admiralty exercised censorship over the German wireless, the Home Office acted at various times against the pacifist press quite independently of the Bureau. Field censorship examined the war correspondents copy without reference to the Bureau and Competent Military Authorities occasionally acted against local papers and journalists in breach of D.O.R.A. Regulations, albeit under restraint from the War Office and Home Office. The activities of these authorities tended to be lumped together in the public mind as 'the censorship' with the Bureau in some way responsible and the Manchester Guardian was justified in drawing its readers attention to this confusion.

But the Bureau was no 'humble instrument'. The censorship sections of the Service departments regularly consulted the Directors of the Bureau and in some areas, such as Foreign Affairs, the Bureau exercised censorship virtually on its own behalf after December 1915. Nor was the Manchester Guardian justified in suggesting that these

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3. Taylor, op. cit., (1963) p. 57.

various departmental activities 'hampered free discussion' during the war years. Isolated actions like the brief suppression of The Globe and Forward and the spasmodic destruction of pacifist literature were not typical of the way news or the newspaper press were treated by the authorities. No press in Europe was as free to criticise its government as was the British press; no journalists in Europe enjoyed as much liberty to attack politicians, Service departments and even serving officers as British journalists - attacks and criticisms which evoked occasional threats of retaliation but nonetheless were published and without official reprisal. As Herbert Samuel told the House of Commons in 1916, the picture 'of a shackled Press, silent, tongue tied,oppressed by a Government at once timorous and tyrannous is a picture which I think can be disproved by anyone who chooses to go to any bookstall and spend a half-penny on almost any organ'.[4]

There was more justification in the charge that information had been suppressed 'which publicity could only have done good'. The suppression at official request of news of the sinking of the 'Audacious' was unwise in 1914 and perverse by 1918 but such requests for total suppression were exceedingly rare and like all the other requests was ignored by some journals. What the Manchester Guardian did not emphasize was that the suppression and manipulation of news during the war was carried out with the voluntary collaboration of most newspapers and that the level of cooperation between the newspaper press and the various censorship authorities was for the most part very close indeed. This voluntary element was a key factor in the operation of the British system. There was no legal obligation on newspapers to obey the official instructions and requests nor to submit copy to the Bureau for censorship. They did so because in the words of the Newspaper Press Directory the press '...submitted with unquestioning loyalty; with few exceptions it supported the government in every way, doing its possible best

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4. House of Commons Debates, 5th Series, 8th May 1916, Col. 423.

in every circumstance to forward the great issue of winning the war ...having always the secret conviction that half the restrictions were useless and absurd'.[5]

This patriotic commitment of the press in effect made an official press censorship unnecessary as many newspapers pointed out during the war. Because British newspapers reached the neutral countries and through them Germany, the officially stated reason for having a censorship was to prevent information of possible value reaching the enemy through press publications. Details of the names and activities of individual regiments and soldiers letters from the front were for example censored on the grounds that such information could be of value to the enemy High Command. But as the newspapers tirelessly pointed out such information was generally known to the enemy through normal military intelligence gleaned from such sources as P.O.W's. It was for example very annoying for the Manchester Guardian to learn of an engagement involving the Manchester Regiment from a bulletin broadcast on the German wireless. On the other hand it was strongly argued by Balfour when First Lord of the Admiralty that suppression of detailed information about Zeppelin raids was vital on the grounds that Zeppelin navigation was so inaccurate that only through newspaper reports would the German authorities be able to learn with any degree of certainty where their raiders had inflicted damage. But to gain such intelligence from British newspapers bearing in mind their well earned reputation for exaggeration and inaccuracy would be a vast and self defeating task.

A voluntary system also raises a major question of journalistic ethics of how far newspapers which exist to report news as truthfully as possible should participate surreptitiously in a state-sponsored scheme of suppression. In a voluntary system journalists become in effect the censor and inevitably part of the executive machinery of the state; in a wholly state-run system, they take orders like every

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5. Newspaper Press Directory, (1920).

other member of society and are relatively free of the moral dilemma of having to decide how far to betray their professional objectivity for the sake of the interests of the state. The Newspaper Press Directory already cited had little doubt on this matter : 'Whatever may be in store in the future it can honestly be said that the British Press as a whole has worthily maintained its honourable repute and that its personnel is still animated by the highest standards that have always prevailed in the journalistic profession'.[6] But any system of voluntary censorship is endemically unfair in its operation and inevitably encourages a debasement of standards. The lofty, self-righteous tone of the Directory rings a trifle hollow when set against the record of newspapers demanding administrative action against their contemporaries for ignoring official instructions, the unedifying spectacle of newspapers applauding and encouraging the destruction of pacifist literature and the evidence of newspapers anxious to publish false and misleading information - all 'in the national interest'. At the same time, the very existence of a press censorship however voluntary or inefficient, undermined to some extent the credibility of British newspapers both at home and abroad and as Harold Evans editor of The Times has recently pointed out about the D Notice system in general : 'Third World journalists are always saying "But you are censored by the D Notice system, are you not?" I think the perception of the relative freedom of the British press is affected in an adverse way by the existence of the D Notice system misunderstood'.[7] (sic.)

By late 1915 press and political opinion was almost universal in its belief that the voluntary press censorship was unfair, inefficient and unnecessary, the embodiment in many ways of the weakness and failures of the Liberal laissez faire state in its efforts to wage war. Liberals became increasingly concerned that it had become the tool of the military, indifferent to the virulent press attacks upon

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6. Newspaper Press Directory, op. cit.,(1920).

7. Harold Evans, submission to the Defence Committee on the D Notice System, 22nd July 1980, Sessional (Parliamentary) Papers (HCDC 773), p. 121.

Liberal politicians like Haldane and Churchill while allowing the jingos, the military experts like Repington and the press barons like Northcliffe to do and say just what they liked. Unionists saw in its voluntary character and in its ineffectiveness to publicise the war and suppress pacifist opinion, typical manifestations of the weak minded Liberal approach to prosecuting the war. Both sides demanded action - a tougher press censorship and in effect a state controlled press, a paradoxical situation in that neither side had any real desire to place the press in chains.

The issue of the press censorship became one of the major battle-grounds in the struggle between those who argued that only the imposition of state control over almost all aspects of British society would win the war and those who fought a mainly losing battle for the values and ways of the free enterprise laissez-faire state. The credibility of the Asquith premiership was undermined by the daily assaults in Parliament and the press on 'the Censorship' which were certainly a contributory factor to his eventual downfall. The inefficiencies and occasional foolish decisions by the censors were a gift for Asquith's enemies and it is perhaps not surprising to discover that the calls for a tougher censorship quickly died away with the coming to power of Lloyd George and a more overtly rigorous prosecution of the war. But the voluntary press censorship remained to the end, one of the few surviving monuments of the lassez-faire ideal, the 'logically indefensible compromise'[8] of a free but censored press.

If press and Parliament were so united in their belief that it was unnecessary, what kept the press censorship in existence? The Spectator on 13th November 1915 for example argued a very convincing case for a totally uncensored press in which 'Free rein would be given...to every sort of inaccuracy, wild surmise and "perilous disclosure"...and although the exact truth would of course be published in the medley and would be extremely damaging to our interests

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8. Sir Edward Cook, op. cit., (1920), p.44.

if known by the enemy to be the truth - it would probably be impossible for him to disentangle it from other statements that flatly contradicted it. The false and the true would cancel one another. We can imagine a German intelligence officer trying to garner information from the confusion of a wholy uncensored Press. We fancy he would have to own himself defeated'.

The press censorship remained because, as in many other aspects of the war, the military authorities said it was necessary and the civilians, in Government and in the press, deferred to what they considered to be expert opinion. As The Spectator itself acknowledged : '..the overwhelming opinion of the naval and military experts is that a Press Censorship is indispensable. The only thing for sensible laymen to do therefore is to accept the situation'.

The deeply held Service view that the press were not really to be trusted held sway throughout the First World War and on into the future. Commenting on the closure of the Bureau, the Daily News told its readers on 3rd April 1919 that 'We hope the nation will never again have to consent to its revival'. The Manchester Guardian hoped that 'the time has come to abolish the censorship root and branch and to let everywhere have light' (3rd April 1919). But the Services had other ideas. The behaviour of a few mavericks like Ashmead Bartlett, Keith Murdoch, Arthur Moore and Charles à Court Repington had made a far more lasting impression on Service minds than a host of patriotic and subservient editors and war correspondents and in planning for the future they were not going to take any chances. Both Services insisted on the retention of the Admiralty/War Office/Press (and now Air) Committee after the war thus perpetuating in Britain, unlike most other countries, a voluntary press censorship over Defence items, a practice which has persisted to this day much to the astonishment of foreign journalists who according to Leonard Downie of the Washington Post in evidence to the Defence Committee on the D Notice System find it 'unusual and amazing' (The Times, 23rd July 1980).

The voluntary press censorship was more than 'unusual and amazing' - it was also an extremely effective method for the Service Departments and other government authorities to exercise surreptitious influence and occasional control over the press without resort to the more crudely repressive, albeit more open methods of censorship practised in most of the belligerent countries. A situation in which the newspaper press, despite public protestations, was willing to implement instructions and accept guidance filtered through to it by a Press Bureau which in the words of a 1923 CID memorandum 'divorced the Service Departments from control of a subject which gives rise to such acute political controversy as Press Censorship' was considered by the War Office to be an 'experience...(which) cannot be improved upon'[9] Not surprisingly, it was a system that was recommended by the Service Departments in 1923 to be revived in the event of a future large scale war.

For the press, the experience was less satisfactory. Like many British institutions, voluntary censorship begun in 1912 and administered during the war by the Press Bureau was an ad hoc arrangement which grew into an established system without the principal participant, the newspaper press, fully considering the implications. Voluntary censorship was and is a deeply corrupting practice for British journalism because, by encouraging an already well developed propensity for self-censorship and discretion 'in the national interest,' it undermines the moral authority of newspapers as critics and objective seekers after truth. Too many times during the First World War, editors postured as critics of the censorship in the leader columns while reflecting the officially inspired viewpoint in their news stories, an unhealthy situation for them and their readers.

For society in general, a voluntary press censorship was and is even less satisfactory. If a press censorship was necessary during the First World War - and the military and naval authorities produced little evidence that it was - then it should have been imposed and

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9. C.I.D. Sub Committee on Censorship Memorandum, June 1923, P.R.O. Cab 15/12.

administered by those authorities. The eventual effect of encouraging journalists to become censors on behalf of the executive was to induce a sense of disbelief by many of the public in the newspaper press and to encourage an all round cynicism in the integrity of public institutions - a heavy price for which we are still paying.

POSTCRIPT

'The one hard and indisputable fact about censorship is that there is nothing, absolutely nothing, to be said in its favor'. Robert D. Summers Wartime Censorship of Press and Radio op. cit., (1942) p.28.

In the Thirties, an Inter-Departmental Committee on Censorship met once a year to revise the war-time plans. Despite the presence on the committee until 1937 of Sir Frank Mitchell, former Assistant Director of the Press Bureau, few of the experiences of the First World War censorship appear to have sunk in. When the Press and Censorship Division under the Ministry of Information was established at the outbreak of war in 1939 (the original idea of a War Press Bureau had been abandoned) this equivalent of the Press Bureau suffered the same agonies of news starvation, interdepartment strife and press abuse as its First World War predecessor.'There have been delays,' Lord Macmillan, Minister of Information complained to the Cabinet in September 1939 but 'a large part of the blame which attached to the Censorship has been due to causes over which the Ministry has no control...namely the long delay before a decision can be obtained from the Service Departments on any question...'[1]

Following Lord Macmillan's resignation in October 1939 (the F.E. Smith of the Second World War) Walter Monckton was appointed Controller of Censorship over a newly created Press Publicity Bureau separate from the Ministry of Information but, to ensure maximum confusion, still housed in the Ministry of Information building at Senate House.This Bureau was to deal only with material voluntarily submitted by the press - all other censorship having been taken from the Ministry of Information and placed with the separate Departments - a recipe for confusion which at least the Press Bureau was spared in the First World War.

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1. Lord Macmillan, Cabinet Memorandum, 18th September 1939. P.R.O. Cab. Prem 1/439.

As the system was voluntary Monckton had the same sort of problems of unfairness and enforcement as did Cook and Swettenham and the other Press Bureau Directors in the First World War. On 26th November 1939 we find him writing to Lord Camrose proprietor of the Daily Telegraph that his paper was'making the system of voluntary submitting more difficult...by refraining from submitting matter which in my judgement ought certainly to be submitted...the effect upon the other newspapers has already been to exasperate them because their competitors are allowed to insert something which they are advised to omit in the public interest'.[2]

Like the Press Bureau Directors in the First World War, Monckton found himself frustrated that his Bureau had no power of enforcement and even more frustrated and annoyed to discover how extremely reluctant the Service Departments were to become entangled in any direct confrontation with the press. Monckton drew the Cabinet's attention on 21st December 1939 to a case involving the Daily Telegraph and the Admiralty in which Monckton had requested 'a witness from the Admiralty to give evidence that the matter published contains information of real value to the enemy (but) I have found that they (the Admiralty) are not prepared to go so far'.[3] The overwhelming sense of déjà vu in reading such comments is reinforced by discovering that Monckton, like Buckmaster in the First World War, went on to advise the Cabinet that '...a voluntary system will not be effective unless it is operated by one single responsible department which makes and answers for all decisions. A compulsory system may be the alternative'.[4]

But this alternative was not applied because in April 1940 Monckton got his way and responsibility for all press censorship was returned to his Bureau under the overall control of the Ministry of Information.

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2. Monckton to Camrose, 26th November 1939, P.R.O. Cab. Prem 1/439.
3. Monckton, (Cabinet Memorandum) 21st December 1939, ibid.
4. ibid.

More significantly for the survival of the voluntary system, Brendan Bracken was appointed Minister in 1941 and for the first time in its history, a voluntary war-time censorship had a political master who really understood the press and who enjoyed direct and personal access to the Prime Minister. But the full story of press censorship during the Second World War must be left to other historians who in addition to the press will have to take into account the vast output and effect of broadcasting and how effectively this was supervised by the censorship authorities. Historians might also like to investigate other areas related to the present study - a comparative view of British press censorship in the two wars being an obvious follow-up. Further work could well be done, using German sources, to investigate the operational use, if any, made by German military intelligence of British press sources. There is also a rich vein to tap in pursuing the point made by numerous contemporary commentators that the First World War censorship undermined the credibility of the post-war British press and public institutions - how far is this valid and to what effect? Finally the D Notices. A history of the D Notices from 1912 to the recent findings of the Third Report of the Defence Committee and beyond would make not only a fascinating and topical story but a valuable contribution to the study of Defence reporting in the British press.

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